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The Works of Théophile Gautier ... : Avatar. Jettatura. The water ...

Théophile Gautier

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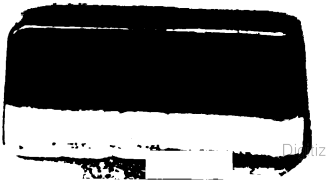

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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

IN TWENTY-FOUR VOLUMES

LIMITED TO ONE THOUSAND REGISTERED SETS, OF WHICH THIS IS NUMBER 752

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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME FIFTEEN

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

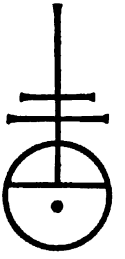
PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST

Department of French, Harvard University

A V A T A R

JETTATURA · THE WATER PAVILION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR



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The sunshade was closed, and there burst on our sight a woman of incomparable beauty . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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Introduction

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AVATAR

Introduction

THE mysterious, the weird, the ghostly, the occult are conspicuously absent from the works of the Classicists, especially of those who furnished fiction to the generation to which the earlier Romanticists belonged. Partly for this reason, partly because the adherents of the new school were resolved to do in all things the very opposite of what was done by their adversaries and contemners, and largely because of the influence of German and English literature upon minds already prepared for the reception of novelties, however startling and unusual, most of the writers of the Romanticist school indulged freely in stories of mystery and awe. Victor Hugo had written "Han d'Islande," a gruesome and melodramatic tale, the hero of which, a dwarf, of course, drank the blood of his foes out of their own skulls. He had introduced another ghastly

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personage of the same family in his "Notre-Dame;" and in his "Rhine," a series of letters of travel, he had inserted a legend constructed upon the most approved mediæval principles, and intended to make the blood of the reader run cold and his hair stand up straight upon his head, — an effect that was undoubtedly attained in the case of thousands of admirers of the author, and of countless readers who knew him by name only.

As it was found to be comparatively easy, in those days of vigorous Romanticism, to move by such means, all the apparatus employed by Shakespeare and by the Germans was turned to account by the enthusiastic French writers of the marvellous. If it be recollected that all this fable and legend and mystery had the further advantage of leaving a perfectly clear field to the imagination of the writer, it will readily be understood how this particular form of fiction came to be so generally adopted by the Romanticists, one of whose cardinal principles it was that art must be absolutely free, or, in other words, that the writer, whether poet, novelist, or dramatist, should be absolutely unfettered both in the choice of his subject and in the manner in which he chose to treat it.

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Again, the passion for local colour was often responsible for extraordinary tales and marvellously fantastic poems. An instance of this is found in the second tale included in this volume. "Jettatura" is in great part the result of Gautier's desire to render the superstition of the South in all its vigour and all its consequences; to present it as it strikes a stranger, previously unacquainted with it, but who, through the force of circumstances, soon gets to believe what those around him believe. And it must be owned, even by prejudiced readers, that this result had been fully attained by Gautier. He has certainly succeeded in impressing his public with the sensation of the South, and in making intelligible the superstition that has so fast a hold upon the inhabitants of Naples.

Of course, innumerable logical objections at once occur to the dispassionate reader, to the man who refuses to yield to the spell that Gautier would cast upon him. The sequence of events is not irreproachable, and there are unmistakable weaknesses here and there that a careful modern writer, trained in the school of Réalism, would have avoided, but the main object is attained: the superstition is explained and the interest of the reader is secured.

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In each of the two tales, "Avatar" and "Jettatura," the position of the author and the reader is identical with that of the dramatist and the spectator of a melodrama. Provided the spectator is willing to allow the dramatist perfect liberty of action and will consent to forego his right of criticism, the playwright will undertake to produce a combination of scenes and situations that shall move, excite, and interest the spectator and keep him breathless from the rising of the curtain unto the going down of the same. So with these stories: grant Gautier what he asks, and what it is reasonable he should ask, in view of the particular form of intellectual and emotional entertainment sought by his reader, and he will accomplish what he undertakes to do — to keep one entertained and interested. And what more can be desired? — especially when it is borne in mind that he was writing these tales for publication in a daily newspaper that required of him spicy entertainment for a constituency composed mainly of the detested bourgeois class, which in all countries at the present day still revels in the sensational and cares little or nothing for the psychological or the reasonable.

Thus, while one may fairly object to the peculiar resolution taken by Paul d'Aspremont to blind himself

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in order that he may not destroy by his glances the woman he loves, though he first and foremost looks at her hard enough and long enough to annihilate her on the spot; while one may wonder at the extraordinary rapidity with which the death of the girl is brought about, and may feel not unreasonable incredulity at the terrific portents and phenomena that preface and accompany the suicide of the hero, yet all these things are perfectly consistent with the general idea of the story, and quite in accord with the particular system of fiction that obtained so largely at that period.

Almost equally startling is the tale of metempsychosis which Gautier has entitled "Avatar." Almost, not quite, for there can be no doubt in the mind of any sane reader that in this story Gautier is not attempting to relate any actual occurrence, but merely to give free play to his fancy, while in "Jettatura" there is evident a desire to convince the reader of the truth of the events narrated. But "Avatar" is really more interesting and more artistic, though the stage-setting is uncommonly fanciful, and the plot extravagant. There is in this story a really clever situation, which the author has most happily saved. The mere transference of the soul of one man to the body of another is not in

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itself a novelty in fiction, and apart from the possible comical or tragical mistakes to which it may give rise, is not startlingly novel. But, owing to the motive which Gautier has invented to account for the transference in the case of Octavius and the husband of the woman he loves, a new element of interest and disquietude enters into the story. As a matter of fact, it is not with Octavius and his mad passion for that *rara avis* in Romanticist literature — a perfectly pure and absolutely chaste woman — nor with the angry and helpless Labinski that one is concerned, but with the Countess herself, the unconscious victim of the hideous plot laid by the old French doctor and Octavius. Here was indeed a dramatic situation, and one that might well lead to most unpleasant results, which, however, a modern Realist would not have hesitated to bring about, and to describe with fullest wealth of epithet and crude phrase. Gautier has admirably saved the situation and won a triumph for himself in the clever scene in which the Countess, alarmed by the hot glance of Octavius-Labinski, so skilfully and so wittily avoids the apparently inevitable. It was a delicate subject to handle, and Gautier has handled it like a master.

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INTRODUCTION

"The Water Pavilion" is a graceful exotic fancy, in which the author sought to exhibit his mastery of local colour, so much in vogue among the Romanticists, rather than a story in the ordinary meaning of the word. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the love incidents in themselves are chiefly used for the purpose of bringing out the peculiarities of Chinese education and Chinese manners. The description of the Water Pavilion itself is one of those delicate bits that Gautier alone can manage with complete success, and the other delightful picture, that of the two young people first becoming aware of each other's existence, suffices to account for the prolonged popularity of this particular story of Gautier's.

"The Water Pavilion" was the first published, for it appeared in 1846 in the September number of the *Musée des familles*, and six years later in the volume entitled "The Tiger Skin," being finally included, in 1863, in "Novels and Tales." "Jettatura" saw the light in the columns of the *Moniteur universel*, coming out in instalments between the end of June and the end of July, 1856. It bore then the title "Paul d'Aspremont," but had been advertised three years before under the name "The Jettatore," and when it was

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subsequently published in book form, in 1857, it assumed its present title, which has ever since been retained. "Avatar" also came out in the columns of the *Moniteur universel*, in 1856, and was republished in book form in the course of the following year.

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Avatar

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AVATAR

I

OCTAVIUS DE SAVILLE was slowly dying of a mysterious disease, which baffled every one. He was not bedridden; he led his usual life; nor did a complaint ever escape him, but he was visibly wasting away. To the inquiries of the physicians whom his anxious relatives and friends insisted upon his consulting, he answered that he felt no particular pain, and the medical men failed to discover in him any alarming symptoms. The auscultation of his chest resulted in a satisfactory sound, and scarce could a too slow or too rapid beating of the heart be noted when the ear was applied to that organ. He did not cough, he had no fever, yet life was leaving him through one of the numerous leaks of which, according to Terentius, the human frame is full.

Sometimes a strange syncope would make him turn pale and cold as marble. For a moment or two he looked like a dead man, then the pendulum, released

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by the mysterious finger that had held it back, resumed its swing, and Octavius seemed to awake as out of a dream. He had been sent to drink the waters, but the nymphs of the streams had been powerless to help him. Nor did a trip to Naples prove more efficacious; its glorious sun, so much bepraised, had seemed to him as dark as that in Albrecht Dürer's engraving; the bat that bears on its wing the single word, *Melancholia*, flapped its dusty membranes in the azure heavens and fluttered between him and the light. On the Mergellina Quay, where the half nude lazzaroni cook themselves in the sunshine and impart a bronze patina to their skins, he had shivered with cold.

He had, therefore, returned to his little apartment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, and, to all outward appearance, had resumed his former habits.

The apartment was as comfortably furnished as it is possible for a bachelor's home to be; but as dwellings gradually assume the aspect, and perchance even acquire the thoughts, of their inhabitants, Octavius' rooms had gradually become duller: the damask of the curtains had faded and a gray light alone filtered through it. The great clumps of peonies were withering on the white ground of the carpet, itself dingier; the gilding

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of the frames of a few water-colour paintings and of sketches by distinguished artists had slowly reddened under the implacable dust; the fire, discouraged, was dying out and smoking amid the ashes. The old Boulle clock, inlaid with brass and tortoise-shell, attenuated the sound of its ticking, and the chimes struck the weary hours softly as in a sick chamber. The doors closed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the few visitors were deadened by the thick Wilton carpet. Laughter stopped of itself as one entered these cold, dark, gloomy rooms, where, nevertheless, reigned the fullest modern luxury. John, Octavius' valet, glided through them like a shadow, his duster under his arm, for, unwittingly impressed by the melancholy atmosphere of the place, he had ended by losing his loquacity. On the walls hung trophies composed of boxing-gloves, masks, and foils, but it was plain that they had not been used for a long time. On the tables and other pieces of furniture lay books taken up and then thrown away carelessly, as though Octavius had sought to lull some fixed thought by mechanical reading. A letter begun, but the paper of which had grown yellow, seemed to have been awaiting completion for some months past, and lay like a mute reproach upon the centre of the desk. The

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apartment looked deserted though it was inhabited; life had withdrawn from it, and on entering it one was met by a puff of cold air such as issues from a vault when it is opened.

In this gloomy abode, where never the tip of a woman's boot ventured, Octavius was happier than anywhere else. The silence and solitude suited him; the joyous bustle of life, in which he occasionally endeavoured to take part, repelled him; he returned more sombre than ever from the masquerades, the evening parties and the suppers to which his friends took him. He had, therefore, ceased to struggle against his mysterious suffering and let the days slip by with the indifference of a man who no longer reckons on the morrow. He formed no plans, for he no longer believed in the future, and having tacitly handed in to God his resignation of life, he waited for its acceptance. But it would be a mistake to suppose that his face was hollowed and thin, that his complexion was wan, his limbs worn out, or that he was outwardly wasted away; scarcely did a few brown marks show under the eyes, an orange tint around them, and a slight wrinkling on the blue-veined temples. What was lacking was the sparkle of the eye, whence will, hope, and desire had

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fled. The dead glance in the young face formed a strange contrast and produced a more painful impression than the worn features and the feverish eyes that mark the ordinary invalid.

Before falling into this wasting sickness Octavius had been, and indeed yet was, what is called a handsome young fellow. He had thick black hair, that curled richly and fell silky and lustrous on either side of his temples. His eyes, large, velvety, of a dark blue like that of night, fringed with curling lashes, sometimes flashed with a moist glance; when they were at rest and not animated by passion, they were noticeable for the serene quiet characteristic of Orientals indulging in the kieff at the door of a Smyrna or a Constantinople café, after they have smoked their narghileh. He had never had much colour and his complexion resembled those olive-coloured Southern faces that gain their full value in artificial light only. His hands were small and delicate; his feet narrow and well-shaped. He dressed well, without being ahead of the fashion of the day or behind it either, and knew perfectly how to bring out to the full his natural advantages. Although he did not pretend to be a dandy or a gentleman-rider, he would not have been refused at

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the Jockey Club had he chosen to become a candidate for election.

How was it, then, that young, handsome, rich, and with so much cause to be happy, this young man was wasting away so wretchedly? It may be supposed that Octavius was blasé, that the fashionable novels of the day had filled him with their unhealthy notions, that he had ceased to believe in anything, that of his youth and his wealth, squandered in riotous living, naught was left him but debts, but all this was far from the truth. Octavius could not be sated with pleasure, for he had tasted it but little; he was neither splenetic nor atheistic, neither romantic nor a libertine nor a spendthrift; up to this time his life had been given partly to study and partly to enjoyment, like the lives of other young fellows. In the morning he attended the lectures at the Sorbonne, and in the evening he took his stand on the stairs at the Opera to watch the stream of dresses. He was not known to be the lover of a Marble Heart or of a duchess, and he spent his income without allowing his fancies to trench upon his capital. His lawyer thought well of him, so that he was a non-eccentric person, quite incapable of hurling himself down a precipice like Manfred, or of asphyxiating him-

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self like d'Escousse. But as regards the cause of the singular state into which he had fallen, I dare not confess it, so improbable is it in Paris in the nineteenth century, and I therefore leave it to my hero to tell it himself.

As ordinary physicians could make nothing of this strange disease of his, the dissection of souls not being yet undertaken in medical schools, recourse was had in the last resort to a queer physician, who had returned from the East Indies after a long stay in those regions and who had the reputation of performing wonderful cures. Octavius, feeling that this physician was endowed with an extraordinary perspicacity that would enable him to divine his secret, dreaded the doctor's visit, and it was only in deference to the reiterated requests of his mother that he consented to receive Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau.

When the physician entered, Octavius was lying on a divan, a pillow supporting his head, another under his elbow, and a third on his feet. He was wrapped up in the soft warm folds of a gandoura, and reading, or rather holding a book, for his glance, though it rested on a page, was elsewhere. His face was pale, but, as I have already said, did not exhibit any marked

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change. A superficial observer would not have believed the young patient to be in danger, for on the table at his side was a box of cigars instead of the vials, lotions, potions, herb tea, and other medicaments regularly seen in such cases. His clear cut, though somewhat tired features had lost scarcely anything of their grace, and but for the deep atony and the incurably despairing look in his eyes, Octavius seemed to be in the enjoyment of ordinary health.

Indifferent to everything as Octavius might be, he was nevertheless struck by the curious aspect of the physician. Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau seemed to have emerged from some fantastic tale by Hoffmann, and to be walking about in the midst of reality amazed at the sight of this droll character. His deeply tanned face was almost swallowed up by a huge skull which a growing baldness caused to appear larger still. This bare skull, shining like ivory, had retained its white colour, while the face, exposed to the rays of the sun, had acquired, thanks to successive layers of tan, the shade of old oak or a smoky portrait. The flat surfaces, the cavities and the projections of the bones stood out so strongly that the small amount of skin that covered them resembled, with its innumerable

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broken wrinkles, a wet skin drawn over a death's head. The few remaining gray hairs that still lingered on his poll, brushed together in three thin wisps, one of which, springing from the nape of the neck, flattened out in front, while the other two upreared themselves behind his ears, made one regret the old full-bottomed wig or the modern tow mop, and grotesquely topped his nut-cracker-like face. But what irresistibly attracted one in him was his eyes. In the midst of his face tanned by years, calcined by burning skies, worn by study, and on which the fatigue of science and life had left its mark in the form of deep furrows, of widespreading crowfeet, in folds closer pressed than the leaves of a book, there sparkled two eyes of a turquoise blue, inconceivably limpid, fresh, and youthful-looking. These blue stars shone from out of two brown orbits and concentric membranes, the tawny circles of which faintly recalled the feathers arranged in the form of an aureole round the nyctalopial eyes of the owl. It seemed as though, thanks to a spell learned from brahmins and pandits, the doctor had stolen the eyes of a child and had fitted them to his own cadaverous face. Judged by their glances, the old man was twenty and the young man sixty.

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He wore the classical dress of a physician, black coat and trousers, black silk waistcoat, and in his shirt front a huge diamond given him by a nabob or a rajah. But his clothes hung on him as if they were suspended from a hook, and formed perpendicular folds that were broken into sharp angles by his tibias and femurs when he sat down. The blazing sun of India did not of itself account for such phenomenal leanness; no doubt Balthazar Cherbonneau had submitted, in the course of some initiation, to the long fasts of the fakirs and had sat with the yoghis on a gazelle skin between four burning braziers. The loss of flesh, however, did not mean any weakening of his powers; solid ligaments, stretched out on the hands like the strings on the neck of a violin, connected the dry bones of the knuckles and made them move without much creaking.

The doctor took the seat which Octavius pointed to by the side of the divan, folding his elbows like a yard measure and indulging in gestures that betrayed an inveterate habit of sitting on carpets. Thus placed, Dr. Cherbonneau had his back to the light, which shone full on his patient's face, a situation favourable to observation and generally adopted by those who are more desirous of seeing than of being seen. Although the phy-

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sician's face was in the shadow, and the top of his skull, rounded and shining like an ostrich's egg, alone caught the light, Octavius perceived the gleam of the strange blue eyes that seemed endowed with a light of their own, after the manner of phosphorescent bodies. There flashed from them a clear, piercing glance that struck the young man fair in the breast with a sensation of prickling and heat comparable to that caused by emetics.

"Well, sir," said the physician, after a moment of silence during which he appeared to be summing up the signs noted by him in a rapid examination, "I see at once that in your case we have not to do with ordinary pathology. You are not suffering from any of those diseases that are catalogued, the symptoms of which are well known, and which a doctor can cure or aggravate; so that after I have talked a little with you I shall not ask you for a sheet of paper on which to inscribe a harmless formula from the *Codex*, with an undecipherable signature at the bottom of it, for your man to take to the druggist's at the corner."

Octavius smiled faintly, as if to thank the physician for sparing him useless and unnecessary remedies.

"Do not rejoice too soon," continued the doctor. "Because you have neither hypertrophy of the heart,

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nor tuberculosis, nor softening of the spine, nor water on the brain, nor typhoid, nor nervous fever, it does not follow that you are in good health. Give me your hand."

Thinking that Dr. Cherbonneau wished to feel his pulse, and expecting to see him pull out his chronometer, Octavius pulled up the sleeve of his gandoura, uncovered his wrist, and mechanically held it out to the physician. Without troubling to find with his thumb that slow or rapid pulsation which indicates whether the clock of life in man is out of order, Dr. Cherbonneau took the young man's slender, veined, and moist hand in his own brown one, the bony fingers of which looked like the claws of a crab, and felt it, kneaded it and massaged it, so to speak, as if to establish magnetic relations with his patient. Sceptical as Octavius was in medical matters, he could not help feeling a certain nervous anxiety, for it seemed to him that the physician was drawing his very soul out of him by the pressure of his hand, and that the blood had fled from his cheeks.

"My dear Mr. Octavius," said the physician as he dropped the young man's hand, "your condition is more serious than you believe, and science, such as old

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European routine understands it, can do nothing for you. You have lost the will to live, and your soul is gradually detaching itself from your body; you are not suffering from hypochondria, lypemania or any melancholic tendency to suicide. Not in the least. Strange to say, you might, did I not interpose, die without having any appreciable internal or external lesion. It was high time you sent for me, for your spirit clings to your body by a mere thread; however, we shall put a good knot in it."

Whereupon the doctor rubbed his hands gleefully, with a grimacing smile that caused a perfect eddy of wrinkles on his many-lined face.

"I do not know, Dr. Cherbonneau, whether you can cure me or not; to tell the truth, I do not care much whether you do or not, but I am bound to confess that at the first glance you have perceived the cause of the mysterious condition in which I find myself. It seems to me as though my body had become permeable, so that my being escapes from it as water from a sieve. I feel myself melting into the great Everything and I find it difficult to distinguish myself from that into which I am plunging. Though, in order not to grieve my parents and my friends, I perform, so far as I am able, the

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usual pantomime of life, yet that life itself seems to be so far removed from me that there are times when I believe myself to have already left this earthly sphere. I come and go from the same motives that formerly acted upon me and the mechanical impulse of which still subsists, but without entering into what I do. I sit down to table at the usual hours, and appear to be eating and drinking; but I find the spiciest dishes and the headiest wines tasteless; the light of the sun is no brighter than that of the moon as far as I am concerned, and the candles burn with a black flame. On the hottest days of summer I feel cold, and sometimes there falls within me a silence so deep that my heart appears to have stopped beating and the inner wheels to have been arrested by some unknown cause. If the dead can feel, death must be something like that."

"You are suffering," returned the physician, "from a chronic impossibility of living, which is a much more common malady than is supposed. Thought is a force as capable of killing as prussic acid or the electric current, although the traces of the ravages it makes are not perceptible to the slight means of analysis at the disposal of ordinary scientists. What is the grief which has struck its sharp hooked beak into your liver?

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What vaulting ambition in you has overleapt itself and caused you to fall back broken and bruised? What bitter despair are you nursing in your immobility? Are you a prey to the thirst for power? Have you of your own accord given up attaining an end beyond the power of the human will? You are rather young for that. Has some woman betrayed you?"

"No such luck, doctor," answered Octavius. "I am not even so fortunate as that would imply."

"Yet," replied Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, "I can read in your lack-lustre eyes, in the discouraged attitude of your body, in the dull tone of your voice, the title of one of Shakespeare's plays as plainly as if it were stamped in gilt letters on the back of a morocco binding."

"And what is the play I translate unwittingly?" asked Octavius, whose curiosity was awakened in spite of himself.

"'Love's Labour's Lost,'" returned the doctor, in an accent so correct that it testified to a long sojourn in the British possessions in India.

Octavius did not answer, but a blush mantled his cheeks, and to conceal his embarrassment he took to playing with the cords of his girdle. The doctor had

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crossed his legs in a way to suggest the cross bones on tombstones, and held his foot with his hand in the Oriental fashion. His blue eyes looked straight into Octavius' and questioned him with a glance at once imperious and gentle.

"Come, confide in me," said he. "I am the physician of souls; you are my patient, and like a Roman priest with his penitent I call for a full confession, which you can make without having to kneel down."

"What would be the good of it? Even supposing you have guessed aright, it would not ease my pain to tell you of it. I am not a talkative sufferer, and no human power, not even yours, can cure me."

"That is as may be," returned the doctor, settling himself more comfortably in his arm-chair, like a man making ready to listen to somewhat lengthy confidences.

"I do not mean," went on Octavius, "that you shall accuse me of childish obstinacy, and give you the chance, through my keeping silence, of washing your hands of my death; so, since you insist upon it, I shall tell you my story; you have guessed the main part of it; I shall not refuse to let you hear the details. But do not look for anything romantic or singular. My adventure is very simple, very common, very ordinary;

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but, as Heine says in his song, it is always new to the subject of it and breaks his heart. Indeed, I am somewhat ashamed to tell so commonplace a thing to a man like you, who have lived in the strangest and the most wonderful lands."

"Let not that trouble you; it is only the commonplace that is extraordinary to me now," returned the physician, with a smile.

"Well, then, doctor, I am dying of love."

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II

I HAPPENED to be in Florence in 184–, at the end of the summer, that is, at the best season in which to see Florence. I had leisure, money, good introductions, and I was at that time a cheerful young fellow ready to enjoy life. I lodged on the Long' Arno, secured a carriage, and let myself be carried away by that delightful Florentine life so charming to a stranger. In the morning I would visit some one of the churches, a palazzo, or a gallery, at my leisure and without hurrying myself, for I desired to avoid having that indigestion of masterpieces that causes tourists in Italy, when too eager, to hate art. At other times I would study the bronze gates of the Baptistery, or the Perseus by Benvenuto under the Loggia dei Lanzi, the portrait of the Fornarina at the Uffizi, or again Canova's Venus in the Pitti Palace, but I never studied more than one thing at a time. Then I would breakfast at the Café Doney on a cup of iced coffee, smoke a few cigars, run through the papers, and after having, whether I would or not, purchased a flower for

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my buttonhole from the pretty flower-girls in straw hats who ply their trade in front of the café, I returned home to enjoy a siesta. At three o'clock my carriage drove up to take me to the Cascine, which is to Florence what the Bois de Boulogne is to Paris, save that every one knows every one else and that the round open space forms an open-air drawing-room, where the arm-chairs are replaced by carriages drawn up in a semicircle. The ladies, in full dress, half recumbent on the cushions, receive the visits of their lovers and particular admirers, of the dandies and the attachés, who remain standing on the carriage step bare-headed. But you know all about it as well as I do. It is there that plans are made for the evenings, that meetings are arranged, that answers are given and invitations accepted. It is like a Pleasure Exchange held from three to five in the afternoon under the shade of the fine trees and under the loveliest sky in the world. Every one who is any one at all is bound to put in an appearance once a day at the Cascine; nor did I fail to do so, while in the evening, after dinner, I visited friends or went to the Pergola, when the singer was worth the trouble.

"I thus spent one of the happiest months in my life, but that happiness was to be of brief duration. A splen-

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did carriage appeared one day at the Cascine. This superb Vienna-built vehicle, a masterpiece by Laurenzi, shining with the brightest varnish and adorned with an almost regal coat of arms, was drawn by the handsomest pair of horses that ever pranced in Hyde Park or at a Queen's drawing-room at Saint James'. It was driven postillion fashion in the most perfect form by a very young jockey in white breeches and green jacket. The brass on the harness, the axles of the wheels shone like gold and flashed in the sunshine. Everybody watched this splendid equipage, which, after making on the sanded drive a curve as regular as if it had been traced with compasses, drew up alongside of the other carriages. You guess of course that the carriage was not unoccupied, but as it drove up rapidly, it had been impossible to note more than a shoe tip resting on the front cushions, the broad fold of the shawl, and the disk of a sunshade fringed with white silk. The sunshade was closed, and there burst on our sight a woman of incomparable beauty.

"Being on horseback I was able to draw near enough to lose no part of this human masterpiece. The strange lady wore a dress of that silvery water-green which makes any woman whose complexion is not irre-

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proachable, look as black as a mole. It was a piece of audacity on the part of a fair woman sure of herself. A large shawl of white China crape, thickly covered with embroidery of the same colour, enveloped her in its soft drapery that fell in small pleated folds like a tunic by Phidias. Her face was framed in a bonnet of the finest Florentine straw, trimmed with forget-me-nots and delicate water plants with narrow glaucous leaves. She wore no jewels; but a delicately tinted long gray glove enveloped in artistic folds reaching to the elbow the arm with which she supported the ivory handle of her sunshade.

"Forgive me, dear doctor, this society journal description, but the least remembrances assume extraordinary importance in the eyes of a lover. Thick bands of wavy golden hair, the ringlets of which formed as it were waves of light, fell in opulent masses on either side her brow, whiter and purer than the virgin snow that has fallen by night upon the highest summit of an alp. Long, delicate lashes, resembling the golden threads which the mediæval miniaturists set about the heads of their angels, half veiled her eyes of a blue green similar to the light which shines through glaciers under certain sun effects. Her mouth, divinely shaped, had the rosy tint of the valves of Venus' shells, while

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her cheeks resembled timid white roses blushing under the confession of a nightingale or the kiss of a butterfly. No human brush could reproduce that complexion, so exquisite, so blooming, so transparent, that it seemed to have nothing material about it, and its colouring to be due to something else than the common blood that flows through our veins. Alone could the first flush of dawn on the summits of the Sierra Nevada, the rosy tint of some white camellias where the petal turns over, or Parian marble seen through a rosy gauze, give a distant notion of it. So much of her skin as showed between the ribbons of her bonnet and the top of her shawl shone with iridescent fairness, with faint opaline reflections on the edge of the contours. It was the colouring and not the drawing of that dazzling head that first attracted one, like the fine works of the Venetian school, though her features were as pure and delicate as those of antique profiles engraved on cameos.

"Just as at the sight of Juliet, Romeo forgot Rosalind, so did I, on the apparition of this sovran beauty, forget all my former loves; the leaves of the book of my heart became fair and clean again, every name and every remembrance was blotted from them. I could not understand how I had ever taken any pleasure in the

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commonplace connections which so few young men manage to steer clear of, and I regretted having indulged in them, just as if they had been positive infidelities. That fateful meeting opened a new life for me.

"The carriage left the Cascine and returned towards the city, bearing away the dazzling vision. I rode by the side of a young Russian, a very amiable fellow and well informed as regarded travellers belonging to the highest society, for he was a great frequenter of watering-places and was received in every cosmopolitan drawing-room in Europe. Little by little I turned the conversation to the strange lady, and I learned that she was the Countess Prascovia Labinski, a Lithuanian lady of illustrious birth and vast wealth, whose husband had now been for two years fighting in the Caucasus.

"I need not relate to you how diplomatically I set to work in order to be introduced to the Countess, who, on account of her husband's absence, was exceedingly careful not to receive many persons; but at last I gained my point, — two dowager princesses and four baronesses of mature age having pledged their antique virtue that I was respectable.

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"Countess Labinski had rented a magnificent villa that had formerly belonged to the Salviati. It stood a couple of miles or so outside of Florence, and in a few days she had managed to install modern comfort in the antique manor without in the least detracting from its severe beauty and its quiet elegance. Great blazoned portières were hung between the pointed arches; old-fashioned arm-chairs and furniture harmonised with the walls, wainscotted in brown woods or covered with frescoes of a dull, faded tone like that of old tapestries. No crude colours, no bright gilding troubled the eye, and the present did not strike a false note in the memories of the past. The Countess herself looked so naturally a lady of the manor that the old palace seemed to have been built expressly for her.

"Deeply impressed as I had been by the radiant beauty of the Countess, I was still more so, after a few visits, by her remarkable, refined, highly cultured mind. When she spoke on a subject that interested her, her soul emerged, so to speak, and became visible. Her fairness was illumined, like alabaster, by an internal light; her complexion glowed with the phosphorescent scintillations, the luminous quiverings, of which Dante speaks in his description of the splendours of

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Paradise; at such times she looked like an angel standing out brightly against the sun. I remained dazzled, plunged in ecstasy, speechless. Absorbed in the contemplation of her beauty, ravished by the sounds of her celestial voice that made every tongue ineffable music, I would stammer, when compelled to speak, a few incoherent words that must have led her to entertain a very low opinion of my intelligence. Sometimes, indeed a faint smile, full of kindly irony, flitted like a rosy gleam upon her lovely lips as I uttered words that betrayed my deep emotion or my incurable folly.

"I had not once as yet spoken to her of my love. In her presence I seemed wholly to lack the power of thinking; I had no strength, no courage; my heart beat as though it would break its bonds and leap into the lap of its queen. Again and again I resolved to speak out, but an insurmountable timidity held me back; the least cold or reserved look on her part made me suffer deadly pain, like a criminal who, his head on the block, is awaiting the stroke of the axe upon his neck. I was choked by nervousness, and icy sweat broke out all over my body. I reddened and turned pale in turns, and finally would leave without having said a word, finding the door with difficulty and

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staggering like a drunken man on the steps of the stairs.

"Once outside, my faculties returned and I poured out to the winds the most burning dithyrambics, addressing to my absent idol a thousand declarations of love irresistible in their eloquence. In these mute apostrophes I equalled the greatest poets that have sung of love. Solomon's "Song of Songs," with its troublous Oriental perfume and its hasheesh-inspired lyricism, Petrarch's sonnets, with their platonic subtleties and their ethereal sweetness, Heinrich Heine's Intermezzo, full of nervous delirious feeling, fell far short of these inexhaustible effusions of my soul in which I exhausted my life. As I ended these monologues, it seemed to me that the Countess, vanquished at last, must of necessity descend from heaven upon my heart, and more than once I closed my arms believing that I was clasping her in them.

"I was so thoroughly possessed that I would spend whole hours murmuring like a litany of love the two words, Prascovia Labinski,—experiencing inexpressible delight in the speaking of these syllables, that now I dropped slowly as though they were pearls, and now spoke with the feverish volubility of a devotee intoxicated

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by his prayer itself. At other times I would write her beloved name upon the finest sheets of vellum, indulging in all the calligraphic refinements of the manuscripts of the Middle Ages, ornaments of gold, fleurons of azure, scrolls of green. I spent in this minutely passionate and childishly perfect labour the weary hours that intervened between my visits to the Countess. I could neither read nor busy myself with anything. Outside of Prascovia nothing interested me, and I did not even open the letters that reached me from France. I made repeated efforts to shake off this condition; I tried to recall the axioms of seduction believed in by young men and the stratagems resorted to by the Lovelaces of the Café de Paris and the Don Juans of the Jockey Club; but when it came to applying these, my heart would fail me and I would regret that I did not possess, like Stendhal's Julian Sorel, a series of graduated letters that I might copy and send to the Countess. I was satisfied with loving her, giving myself wholly without asking for aught in return, without even the most distant hope, for in my boldest dreams I scarcely dared to touch with my lips her rosy finger tips. No more religiously could a young novice in the fifteenth century, his brow pressed upon the steps of the altar, or a

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knight kneeling in his armour of steel, have worshipped the Blessed Virgin."

Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau had listened to Octavius with deep attention, the young man's story being to him something more than a mere romantic tale, and he said to himself, during one of the pauses made by the narrator: "Yes, that is the very diagnosis of the passion of love; a curious disease that I have but once before met with, at Chandernagore, in a young pariah maid who loved a Brahmin. She died of it, did the poor girl, but she was a savage, while you, Mr. Octavius you are civilised, and I shall cure you."

Having closed his parenthesis, he signed to the young man to proceed, and, having folded his leg back against his thigh like the leg of a grasshopper, so as to rest his chin on his knee, he settled himself in that position, which no one else could have assumed, but which seemed to be particularly commodious in his case.

"I shall not weary you with a detailed account of my secret martyrdom," continued Octavius, "and I shall come at once to a decisive incident. One day, unable longer to repress my imperious desire to see the Countess, I called earlier than usual. The weather

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was close and stormy. I did not find her in the drawing-room; she had settled herself under a portico, supported by slender pillars, that opened on a terrace leading down to the gardens. She had had her piano, rattan arm-chairs, and chairs brought there; flower-stands, filled with the choicest flowers — nowhere so beautiful as in Florence — stood in the spaces between the pillars and perfumed the faint puffs of air that at long intervals blew down from the Apennines. Through the open arcading showed the trimmed yews and clipped box-trees of the garden, while centenarian cypresses rose from among them and a population of mythological marbles in the fretful taste of Baccio Bandinelli and Ammanato. In the distance, above the sky-line of Florence, swelled the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore and the square belfry-tower of the Palazzo Vecchio rose in the air.

"The Countess was alone, resting on the rattan couch. Never had she seemed so fair; her lissom body, relaxed by the heat, was plunged, like that of a sea-nymph, in the white foam of a full Indian muslin wrapper, trimmed from top to bottom with a fringe curled like the silver crest of a wave. A brooch of Khorassan inlaid steel fastened on the bosom this robe

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which was as light as the drapery that flutters around the Bending Victory. From her sleeves, open above the elbow, like the pistil of the calyx of a flower, emerged her arms purer in tone than the alabaster the Florentine sculptors use in making copies of antique statues. A broad black ribbon, fastened at the waist and the ends of which fell down in front, contrasted strongly with the white of the dress. This contrast of shades, commonly adopted for mourning, was brightened by the tip of a little Circassian slipper, without heel-pieces, and embossed with yellow arabesques, that peeped out under the hem of the muslin skirt.

"The Countess' fair hair, the puffed bandeaux of which, as though lifted by the breeze, showed her fair brow and her transparent temples, formed a sort of halo round her head in which the light played with golden scintillations.

"On a chair by her side fluttered in the wind the brim of a great rice-straw hat, trimmed with long black ribbons like those on the dress, and by it lay a pair of Suède gloves that had never been worn. As she saw me, Prascovia closed the book she was reading — it was the 'Poems of Miskiewicz' — and gave me a kindly nod. She was alone, an uncommon and favourable cir-

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cumstance. I sat down in front of her on the seat she pointed to. Silence, embarrassing when prolonged, fell upon us for a few moments. I could not think of any of the usual commonplaces of conversation; my brain was inert, hot flushes rose from my heart to my eyes, and my love cried out to me: 'Do not lose this supreme chance.'

"I know not what I might have done, had not the Countess, who divined my emotion, half risen and stretched out her lovely hand as if to close my lips.

"'Do not say a word, Octavius; you love me; I know it, I feel it, I believe it. Nor am I angry with you on that account, for love is involuntary. Other and more severe women would take offence; but as for me, I pity you, for I cannot love you and it is sad for me to be the cause of sorrow to you. I regret that you ever met me, and I curse the caprice that led me to leave Venice for Florence. I had hoped that my persistent coolness would weary you and cause you to leave me; but true love, every mark of which I read in your eyes, is not to be repelled. Let not my kindness lead you to indulge in the least illusion, in the least dream of hope, and do not mistake my pity for encouragement. An angel with diamond shield and

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flaming sword protects me against all seductions better than religion, duty, and virtue could do it. That angel is my love. I adore Count Labinski. I am fortunate enough to have found passion in marriage.'

"This frank, loyal, and nobly chaste confession made the tears pour in floods from my eyes, and I felt the springs of life dry up within me. Prascovia much moved, rose and with a movement of gracious feminine pity, dried my eyes with her cambric handkerchief.

"'Come, do not weep,' she said. 'I forbid you to do so. Try to think of something else; fancy that I have gone forever, that I am dead; forget me. Travel, work, do good, take an active part in human affairs; let art or another love console you.'

"I interrupted her with a gesture of negation.

"'Do you think you would suffer less if you continued to see me?' went on the Countess. 'Come, then; I shall always be at home to you. God says we must forgive our enemies; why, then, should we treat less generously those who love us? Yet absence seems to me the safer remedy. Two years hence we may meet without danger — so far as you are concerned,' she added with an attempt at a smile.

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"I left Florence the next day, but neither study, nor travel nor time have softened my sufferings, and I feel that I am dying. Pray do not try to prevent it, doctor."

"Have you ever met Countess Labinski since then?" asked the doctor, whose blue eyes shone strangely.

"No," answered Octavius; "but she is now in Paris." And he handed Dr. Cherbonneau an engraved card on which were these words: —

"Countess Prascovia Labinski, at home, Thursdays."

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III

AMONG the then infrequent pedestrians who in the Champs-Élysées proceeded up the Avenue Gabriel, between the Turkish Embassy and the Élysée Bourbon, — preferring the solitude, silence, and coolness of that road, bordered on the one side with trees and on the other with gardens, to the dusty whirl and fashionable bustle of the main road, — there were few who did not stop, thoughtful and admiring, with a touch of envy, in front of a mysterious and poetic retreat in which, wonderful to relate, wealth and happiness seemed to dwell together.

Who is there who has not stayed his steps in front of the gates of a park, and looked long at the white villa within, through the clumps of verdure, and then gone on his way with heavy heart as though the dream of his life were concealed behind the walls? On the other hand, there are dwellings that, thus seen from the exterior, fill one with undefinable gloom; ennui, loneliness, despair seem to make the façades ice-

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cold with their gray tints and to yellow the tops of the half leafless trees; the statues are covered with a mossy leprosy; the flowers are blighted; the water in the ponds is green and stagnant; the weeds, heedless of the hoe, grow on the walks; the birds, if any there be, are silent.

The gardens, on a lower level than the main walk, were separated from it by a ha-ha fence, and ran, in broader or narrower bands, up to the mansion the front of which looked out upon the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. The one to which I refer ended at the ditch in a platform supported by a wall built of large stones, selected on account of the peculiar irregularity of their shapes, and which, rising on either side, like the wings of a stage, framed within their broken outlines and sombre masses the cool, green prospect between them.

In the crevices of these stones Indian fig trees, carnation milk-wort, Saint John's wort, London pride, ivy-leaved toad flax, white stonecrop, red Alpine campion, and Irish ivy had found soil enough to feed their roots, and showed their varied greens against the bold background of stone — no painter could have devised a better set-off in the foreground of his picture.

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The side walls which enclosed this terrestrial paradise disappeared under a mantle of climbing plants, aristolochias, blue passion-flowers, bell-flowers, honeysuckle, gypsophila, Chinese glycinas, periplocas from Greece, the tendrils, filaments, and stems of which twisted and climbed upon a green trellis, for even happiness refuses to be imprisoned. Thanks to this arrangement, the garden resembled a forest clearing rather than a somewhat narrow flower garden circumscribed by civilised fences.

Somewhat behind the masses of rockery were grouped a few clumps of trees, of elegant port and rich foliage, contrasting happily the one with the others: Japanese sumachs, Canadian lignum vitæ, Virginian plane-trees, green ash-trees, white willows, nettle-trees of Provence, and, rising above all these, two or three larches. Beyond the trees stretched a rye-grass lawn, in which not one blade of grass was taller than its neighbour, a sward finer and silkier than a queen's velvet mantle, and of that ideal emerald green seen in perfection only in England in front of the façades of feudal manor-houses; a soft natural carpet which the eye loves to dwell on and the foot fears to press, a vegetable Wilton on which alone may play, by day, the

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tame gazelle and the ducal baby in its lace robes, and, at night, may glide some Titania from the West End, her hand clasped in that of an Oberon whose name is inscribed in Burke's "Peerage and Baronetage."

A walk covered with carefully sieved sand, lest a bit of shell or of flint should hurt the aristocratic feet that left their delicate imprint upon it, ran like a yellow ribbon round the well rolled, green, short, thick sward, which artificial rain kept constantly moistened, even in the driest days of summer.

At the end of the lawn blazed, at the time of my tale, a perfect fireworks of flowers, due to a mass of geraniums the scarlet stars of which flamed against a brown background of heath.

The prospect was closed by the elegant façade of the mansion. Slender Ionic pillars supporting an attic, surmounted, at each corner, by a graceful marble group, gave it the look of a Greek temple transported thither by a millionaire's whim, and it toned down, by the thoughts of art and poetry it awakened, any possible excess in the luxuriousness of the place. Between the pillars the blinds, striped with broad red bands and almost always closed, shaded and indicated the windows, that opened level with the portico like glass doors.

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When the capricious Paris sky condescended to stretch a background of blue behind this palazzino, the lines of it showed so delightfully between the masses of verdure that it might have been taken for the resting place of the Queen of Fairies or for an enlarged painting by Baron.

Had some early rising poet passed through the Avenue Gabriel with the first flush of dawn, he would have heard the nightingale warbling the last trills of its *nocturne*, and seen the blackbird walking about the garden walk in yellow slippers, like one thoroughly at home. At night, that same poet, after the roll of the last carriages returning from the Opera had died out in the silence of the sleeping city, would have dimly made out a white shadow leaning on the arm of a handsome youth, and he would have climbed up to his solitary garret, his soul sick unto death.

The reader has already guessed that this had been for some time the abode of Countess Prascovia Labinski and of her husband, Count Olaf Labinski, who had returned from the war in the Caucasus after a glorious campaign, in which, even though he had not fought hand to hand with the mysterious and elusive Schamyl, he had had to do with the most fanatically devoted

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Mourids of the illustrious sheik. He had escaped the deadly bullets in the way in which brave men escape them, by dashing to meet them, and the curved Damascus blades of the fierce warriors had been broken on his breast without penetrating it. Courage is a cuirass of proof. Count Labinski had the valour of the Slavonic races, which love danger for its own sake, and to whom may still be applied that refrain of the old Scandinavian song: "They slay, die, and laugh."

Thomas Moore alone, writing in the vein of his "Loves of the Angels," could depict the intoxicating joy which filled the pair, for whom marriage was but a passion allowed of God and men, when they were reunited. Every drop of ink in my pen would have to turn into a drop of light, and every word evaporate on the paper in flame and perfume like a grain of incense. How can I paint these two souls melted into one and similar to two dewdrops that, gliding down the petal of a lily, meet, mingle, absorb one another and form but a single pearl? Happiness is so rare a thing in this world that it has not occurred to man to invent words capable of expressing it, while the vocabulary of suffering, moral and physical, fills numberless columns in the dictionaries of every language.

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Olaf and Prascovia had loved each other in childhood; their hearts had never been stirred save by the one name; almost from the cradle they had known that one day they would wed, and the rest of the world did not exist for them. They seemed to be the halves of Plato's androgyne, which have in vain sought each other since the original divorce, and which had met and united in them. They were the duality in unity which is complete harmony, and side by side they walked, or rather flew through life, with an even, sustained flight, soaring like two doves called by the same desire, to recall Dante's exquisite image.

That naught might trouble their felicity it was bathed in a golden atmosphere of immense wealth. Wherever the radiant couple appeared, poverty relieved threw off its rags, and tears dried up; for Olaf and Prascovia had the noble selfishness of happiness: they could not bear the sight of grief within their own radiance.

Since the day when polytheism bore away with it the young gods, the smiling genii, the celestial youths with forms so absolutely perfect, so rhythmically harmonious, so ideally pure, and since Greece has ceased to sing the hymn of beauty in strophes of Parian

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marble, man has taken cruel advantage of the permission to be ugly, and although he was made in the image of God, he is but a poor counterfeit presentment of Him. Count Labinski, however, had not availed himself of the license thus given; the somewhat long oval of his face, his thin nose, bold and delicate in outline, the well cut lips, set off by a blond mustache drawn to a point, his well turned, dimpled chin, his black eyes — a piquant singularity, graceful in its strangeness — made him look like one of those warrior angels, Saint Michael or Saint Gabriel, who, clad in golden armour, fight the demon. He would have been too handsome but for the virile flash of his dark eyes and the tan with which the Asiatic suns had browned his features.

The Count was of medium stature, thin, slender, muscular, concealing a frame of steel under apparent frailness. When, at some ambassadorial ball, he wore his magnate's costume, heavily braided with gold and starred with diamonds, he passed among the guests like a dazzling apparition, exciting the jealousy of the men and the love of the women, whom Prascovia's beauty rendered indifferent to him. I need not add that he had gifts of mind that equalled his physical qualities;

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the good fairies had richly endowed him at his birth, and the wicked fairy that spoils everything had shown herself good-tempered on that day.

It will readily be understood that with such a rival Octavius de Saville had but little chance of success, and that he showed wisdom in letting himself die quietly on the cushions of his divan, in spite of the hopes that the eccentric doctor strove to inspire him with. The only way would have been to forget Prascovia, but it was also the one thing impossible. On the other hand, what was the good of seeing her again? Octavius felt that the young woman's resolve would not abate one jot of its gentle implacability or of its kindly coldness. He dreaded having his yet unhealed wounds reopened and bleeding in the presence of her who was his innocent murderer; nor would he accuse her of it, for he loved her.

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IV

TWO years had elapsed since the day when Countess Labinski had stayed on Octavius' lips the declaration of love she must not listen to. Octavius, his dream rudely shattered, had departed, bearing away with him a consuming grief, and had never sent any news of himself to Prascovia. The one thing he might have written he must not write. Yet more than once had the Countess, frightened by his silence, recalled with sadness the remembrance of her unfortunate adorer. Had he forgotten her? Divinely free from coquetry, she hoped he had, though she could not bring herself to believe it, for the undying flame of passion burned in his eyes, and the Countess had not read it wrong. Love and the gods recognise each other by the glance. The thought was a cloudlet on the clear azure of her happiness, and made her share the gentle sadness of angels that in heaven still remember earth. Her sweet soul suffered because she knew that far away some one was unhappy on her account; yet what can the star that

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twinkles in the heavens do for the lowly herd who passionately stretches out his arms to it? In the days of mythology, it is true, Phoebe did descend from the heavens in the form of a silver beam upon the sleeping Endymion, but she was not wedded to a Polish count.

As soon as she reached Paris, Countess Labinski sent Octavius the hackneyed invitation which Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau was absent-mindedly twisting between his fingers, and when he did not come, she had said to herself with an involuntary movement of joy, "He still loves me!" Yet she was a woman of angelic purity and chaste as the snow on the highest peak of the Himalayas, and Count Olaf himself could not have blamed her for that delicate emotion of her soul.

"Your story, which I have attentively listened to," said the doctor to Octavius, "convinces me that it would be madness for you to entertain the least hope. Countess Labinski will never return your love."

"And therefore, doctor, you must see that I am right not to try to prolong my wasting life."

"What I said was that there is no hope in usual means," went on the doctor. "There are, however,

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occult powers which modern science is unacquainted with, and the traditional knowledge of which has been preserved in those strange countries called barbarous by an ignorant civilisation. There, in the early days of the world, mankind, then in close contact with the living forces of nature, was acquainted with secrets now believed to be lost, and which the migrating tribes, that later grew into nations, did not carry away with them. These secrets were at first transmitted by one of the initiated to another, in the mysterious depths of the temples; next were written in sacred idioms not understood of the vulgar, and cut in panels of hieroglyphs on the cryptic walls of Ellora. You may still, on the slopes of Mount Merou, whence flows the Ganges, at the foot of the white marble steps of Benares, the Holy City, or in the recesses of the ruined pagodas of Ceylon, come upon centenarian Brahmins deciphering unknown manuscripts, or yoghis busy repeating the ineffable monosyllable *om*, unaware that the birds of heaven are nesting in their hair, or fakirs whose shoulders bear the scars inflicted by the iron hooks of Juggernaut. These men possess the lost secrets by means of which, when they choose to make use of them, they obtain marvellous results. Our own Europe, wholly absorbed by

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material cares, does not suspect the degree of spiritualism which has been attained by the penitents of India. Absolute fasts, contemplations terrifying in their intensity, impossible postures maintained for years at a time, have so thoroughly attenuated their bodies that they might be taken, when seen crouching under a burning sun, between blazing braziers, letting their nails grow until they enter the palms of their hands, for Egyptian mummies withdrawn from their cases and bent into the attitudes of monkeys. Their human frame is no more than a chrysalis, which the soul, the immortal butterfly, may leave or return to as it pleases. While their skinny frame remains there, inert, horrible to behold, resembling a larva of night surprised by the daylight, their mind, freed from all bonds, soars on the wings of hallucination, to measureless heights in the supernatural world. They have strange visions and dreams; they follow in a succession of ecstasies the undulations of the vanished centuries upon the ocean of eternity; they traverse the infinite in every direction; they behold the birth of worlds, the genesis and the metamorphoses of the gods. They recall the sciences swallowed up in the Plutonian and diluvian cataclysms, and the forgotten relations of man and the elements.

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In that strange condition they murmur words belonging to tongues that no people has spoken on the surface of the earth for thousands and thousands of years; they come upon the primal Word, the Word that caused the light to flame out of the everlasting darkness. People call them mad; they are almost gods!"

This singular preamble excited in the highest degree Octavius' attention, and not knowing what Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau was driving at, he fixed upon him eyes that were full of amazement and sparkled with questionings. He could not make out the connection between the penitents of India and his love for the Countess Prascovia Labinski.

The doctor guessing his thoughts, waved his hand as if to forestall his questions, and said: —

"Patience, my dear patient; you will see presently that I am not indulging in needless digressions. Weary of questioning with a scalpel, on the marble tables of dissecting schools, bodies that answered not and that showed me but death where I sought life, I formed the project, as bold as that of Prometheus when he stormed the heavens to steal fire, — to find and seize upon the soul, to analyze it, and, so to speak, to dissect it. I abandoned the effect for the cause, and felt the deep-

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est contempt for materialistic science, of which I had fathomed the nothingness. It struck me as coarse empiricism to work upon vague forms and chance aggregations of atoms that were forthwith dissolved. I endeavoured, by making use of magnetism, to relax the bonds that imprison the spirit within its frame, and soon I had gone beyond Mesmer, Deslon, Maxwell, Puységur, Deleuze, and the most skilful of them, in absolutely prodigious experiments, that, however, failed to satisfy me. Catalepsy, somnambulism, second sight, ecstatic lucidity, all these effects, inexplicable to the common run of men, but simple and intelligible to me, I produced at will. I went farther back. From the ecstasies of Cardan and Saint Thomas Aquinas I passed to the nervous attacks of the Pythiæ; I discovered the arcana of the Greek Epoptes and the Hebrew Nebiim; I was retrospectively initiated into the mysteries of Trophonius and Esculapius, ever and always recognising in the marvels told of them either an expansion or a contraction of the soul, due to a gesture, to a glance, to a word, to the will, or some other unknown agent. I performed, one after another, every miracle worked by Apollonius of Tyana, and yet my scientific dream had not come true; the soul still

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escaped me. I could feel it, hear it, act upon it; I could excite or benumb its faculties, but there remained between me and it a fleshy veil that I could not draw aside without its escaping. I was like a bird-catcher that has a bird captive under a net he dare not lift lest he see his winged booty take flight into the heavens.

"I started for India, hoping to discover the solution of the riddle in that land of ancient wisdom. I learned Sanscrit and Pacrit, the learned and the vulgar idioms, and conversed with pandits and Brahmins. I traversed the jungles where roars the tiger crawling on its belly; I passed along the sacred ponds where dwell the scaly crocodiles; I crossed impenetrable forests defended by creepers, starting clouds of bats and troops of monkeys, and coming face to face with elephants at the corner of some path made by wild beasts, in order to reach the hut of a famous yoghi holding intercourse with the Mounis; and I sat for many days by him, sharing his gazelle skin, and noting the faint incantations whispered by his black and cracked lips in his ecstasy. In this way I learned omnipotent words, formulæ of evocation, and syllables of the Creative Word.

"I studied the symbolical carvings in the inner chambers of pagodas that no profane eye has ever rested

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upon and into which my Brahmin's robe allowed me to penetrate. I read many a cosmogonic mystery, many a legend of vanished civilisations. I discovered the meaning of the emblems held in the numerous hands of the hybrid gods, as varied as is nature itself in India. I meditated upon the circle of Brahma, the lotus of Vishnu, the hooded cobra of Siwa, the blue God. Ganesa, stretching out his pachyderm's trunk and winking his little eyes with the long lashes, seemed to smile upon my efforts and to encourage me in my search. Every one of these monstrous figures said to me in their language of stone: 'We are but forms; it is the spirit that acts upon matter.'

"A priest of the Temple of Trincomalee, to whom I confided the idea that haunted me, told me of a penitent who inhabited one of the caves on the island of Elephanta, and who had attained to the highest degree of sublimity. I found him leaning against the wall of the cave, clothed in a rag of esparto, his chin between his knees, his hands clasped on his legs, in a state of absolute immobility. Only the whites of his eyes were visible; and his lips were turned back upon his gumless teeth; his skin, tanned by an incredible leanness, clung to his cheek-bones; his hair, thrown back, hung stiff as

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the filaments of a plant from the edge of a crag, while his beard had parted into two streams that almost touched the ground, and his finger-nails resembled the talons of an eagle.

" He had been blackened and dried up by the sun to such an extent that his Indian's skin, naturally brown, looked like basalt, and as he leaned there he had the shape and colour of a Canopus vase. At the first glance I thought he was dead. I shook him by the arms, which were as if petrified in cataleptic stiffness, and shouted into his ear as loudly as I could the sacramental words by which he would know me for one of the initiated, but he made no motion and his eyelids did not quiver. I was about to depart, hopeless of getting anything out of him, when I heard a strange crackling; a bluish spark flashed past my eyes with the lightning-like rapidity of electric light, fluttered for a second upon the half-opened lips of the penitent, and vanished.

" Brahma-Loghum — such was the name of the holy man — seemed to awake as out of a trance; his eyeballs rolled back into their places, he looked at me with a human glance, and answered my questions.

" ' Well, your wish has been granted; you have seen a soul. I have succeeded in separating mine from my

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body whenever I please. It leaves it and returns to it under the form of a luminous bee, perceptible only to the adepts. I have fasted, prayed, and meditated so long, I have kept up such rigorous macerations, that I have managed to loose the earthly bonds that confine it, and that Vishnu, the god of the ten incarnations, has revealed to me the mysterious word which guides the soul in its avatars through different forms. Should I, after having made the prescribed gestures, speak that word, your soul would flee away to animate the man or the animal I should point out to it. This secret I bequeath to you; I am the only one on this earth who possesses it. I am very glad you have come, for I long to melt away in the bosom of the Uncreated, as does a drop of water in the ocean.'

"Thereupon the penitent whispered in my ear, with a voice as weak as the last murmur of the dying, but perfectly distinct, a few syllables that made, as Job says, 'fear come upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake.'"

"What do you mean, doctor?" cried Octavius. "I dare not venture to sound the terrifying depths of your words."

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"I mean," quietly returned Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, "that I have not forgotten the magical formula of my friend Brahma-Loghum, and that Countess Prascovia would have to be very clever indeed to recognise the soul of Octavius de Saville in the body of Olaf Labinski."

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V

DR. BALTHAZAR'S reputation as a physician and thaumaturgist was beginning to spread through Paris, his eccentricities, whether natural or affected, having made him all the rage. But far from seeking to build up a practice, he did his best to repel patients by closing his door to them, giving them strange prescriptions, or ordering them to follow an impossible regimen. He attended desperate cases only, dismissing to his colleagues with haughty contempt commonplace cases of pneumonia, enteritis, or typhoid fever, and in these difficult cases he made cures that were fairly amazing. Standing by the bedside, he would make magical gestures over a cup of water, and the body, already cold and stiff, and ready for the coffin, would after a few drops of the water had been poured down between the jaws set in the agony of death, recover the flexibility of life and the colours of health, and sit up of itself, casting around a glance already used to the shades of the tomb. Cherbonneau therefore became known as the Physician of the Dead or the

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Resurrectionist. Nor did he always condescend to perform cures, and more than once he refused the large fees offered him by dying millionaires. It required the grief of a mother begging for the life of her only child, the despair of a lover praying for the reprieve of his beloved, or the belief on his part that the endangered life was of use to poetry, science, or the progress of the human race, to induce him to enter the lists with death.

It was thus that he saved the life of a baby dying of croup, that of a lovely girl in the last stages of consumption, that of a poet the victim of *delirium tremens*, and that of an inventor struck down by apoplexy and who was about to carry away with him the secret of his discovery. In other cases he would reply that Nature should not be interfered with, that there was a good reason why certain deaths should occur, and that one ran the risk, by preventing them, of creating a disturbance in the order of the universe. Dr. Cherbonneau, it will be seen, was the most paradoxical of physicians, and had returned from India a confirmed eccentric. His renown as a mesmerist was even greater than his fame as a physician; he had admitted a small number of elect to séances in which he performed prodigies that

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surpassed all notions of the possible or the impossible, and that were far ahead of the wonders wrought by Cagliostro.

The doctor lived on the ground-floor of an old house in the Rue du Regard, where he had an apartment *en suite*, as they used to be built, the high windows of which opened out on a garden planted with great trees with blackened trunks and sparse foliage. Although it was summer, powerful furnaces sent out blasts of hot air through their brass registers into the great rooms, keeping the temperature up to ninety or a hundred degrees, for Balthazar Cherbonneau, accustomed to the burning heats of India, shivered under the pale Parisian sun, just like that traveller who, having returned from the sources of the Blue Nile in Central Africa, trembled with cold in Cairo, and never went out save in a closed carriage, wrapped up in a pelisse of blue Siberian fox fur, and his feet resting upon a tin hot-water foot-warmer.

There was no other furniture in the rooms than low divans covered with Malabar stuffs embellished with chimerical elephants and fabulous birds, what-nots, carved, painted, and gilded with barbaric artlessness by the natives of Ceylon, and Japanese vases filled with

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exotic flowers, while on the floor was spread, from one end of the apartment to the other, one of those funereal carpets with black-and-white flower pattern woven, by way of penance, by imprisoned Thugs, and the woof of which seems to be made of the hemp of their stranglers' cords. On stands in the corners there were a few Hindoo idols, in marble or bronze, cross-legged, with long, almond-shaped eyes, rings in their noses, thick, smiling lips, pearl necklaces falling down to their navels, and mysterious and strange attributes. Along the walls hung miniatures in water-colours, the work of some Calcutta or Lucknow artist, representing the nine avatars through which Vishnu has already passed, the fish, the tortoise, the pig, the human-headed lion, the Brahmin dwarf, the Rama, the hero fighting with the many-armed giant Cartasuciriargunen, the Kitona, the miraculous child, in which some recognise a Hindoo Christ; the Bouddha, worshipping the great god Mahadevi, and, finally, asleep in the centre of the Milky Sea, upon the cobra with its five heads curving up over him in the form of a dais, waiting until it is time to assume, as a last incarnation, the form of the winged pale horse, which, striking the earth with its hoof, is to cause the end of the world.

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In the end room, heated even more than the others, sat Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, surrounded by Sanscrit books engraved with a style upon thin blades of wood pierced with a hole at one end and fastened by a cord in such a way that they resembled Venetian blinds more than the books found in European booksellers' shops. An electrical machine, with its jars full of gold leaf, and its glass disks revolved by handles, exhibited its troublous and complicated silhouette in the centre of the room, by the side of a mesmeric tub into which was set a metal rod and from which radiated numerous iron bars. Dr. Cherbonneau was anything but a charlatan, and did not care for stage-setting, yet it was difficult to enter that strange retreat without experiencing, in part at least, an impression similar to that which alchemists' laboratories must have produced of yore.

Count Olaf Labinski had heard of the miracles wrought by the physician, and his half credulous curiosity had been awakened by these reports. The Slavic races have a natural love for the marvellous, a tendency not always checked by education even of the best. Besides, witnesses of undoubted credibility who had been present at the séances reported things which

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it is impossible to believe unless one has seen them with one's own eyes, however implicitly one may trust in the narrator. So Count Olaf paid the thaumaturgist a visit.

When he entered the place, he felt himself bathed, as it were, in a faint atmosphere of fire; the blood rushed to his brain; his temples throbbed. The excessive heat of the rooms suffocated him; the aromatic oils burning in the lamps, and the great Javanese flowers the huge calyxes of which swung like censers, intoxicated him with their subtile emanations and asphyxiating scents. He staggered towards Dr. Cherbonneau, who was curled up on a divan in one of those curious attitudes adopted by fakirs and sannyasis, so picturesquely illustrated by Prince Soltikoff in his "Travels in India." With his angular limbs showing through the folds of his garments, he looked like a human spider curled up in the centre of its web and remaining motionless in the presence of its prey. At the sight of the Count his turquoise blue eyes lighted up with phosphorescent gleams that played in the centre of their golden orbits brown as hepatite, but they were at once dimmed as if by a film drawn over them at will. The doctor, perceiving Olaf's distress, put out

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his hand towards him and with two or three passes surrounded him with an atmosphere of springtime, thus creating for him a cool paradise in that hell of heat.

"Do you feel any better?" he asked. "Your lungs, used to the Baltic breezes that reach you chilled after passing over the primeval snows of the Pole, must have panted like the bellows of a forge in this burning air, in which, nevertheless, I, who have been baked, roasted, and calcined, as it were, in the furnaces of the sun, shiver and tremble."

Count Olaf Labinski intimated that he no longer suffered from the oppressive heat of the room.

"Well," went on the doctor; "I suppose you have heard of my sleight-of-hand tricks, and are desirous of having a sample of my powers. I am far superior to Comus, Comte, or Bosco."

"My curiosity is not quite so frivolous," answered the Count, "and I have more respect for one of the princes of science."

"I am not a scientist in the usual meaning of the word," returned the physician. "On the other hand, while engaged in studying certain matters disdained by science, I have mastered unemployed occult forces,

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and I produce results that, although natural, seem marvellous. By dint of watching for it, I have occasionally surprised the soul; I have profited by the confidences it has imparted to me, and remembered the words it has spoken to me. The spirit is everything; matter is but a mere appearance, and it may be that the universe is naught else than a dream of God or the irradiation of the Word in the infinite. I play as I please with the rag called the body; I stay life or hasten it; I suppress space; I displace the senses and destroy pain without needing the aid of chloroform, ether, or any other anæsthetic. Armed with my will, which is an intellectual electricity, I give life or blast it. Nothing remains opaque to my eyes; my glance traverses everything. I can distinctly see the rays of thought, and just as the rays of the solar spectrum can be projected on a screen, so I can compel them to pass through my invisible prism and force them to reflect themselves upon the white screen in my brain. But all this is nothing by the side of the prodigies performed by some of the Hindoo yoghis, who have attained the highest pitch of asceticism. We Europeans are too superficial, too careless, too frivolous, too much in love with our earthen prison to open in it

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windows large enough to look out from upon eternity and the infinite. I have, nevertheless, obtained some rather strange results, of which you shall yourself be the judge," concluded Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau as he drew back a heavy portière that concealed a sort of alcove at the end of the room.

By the light of a spirit lamp quivering upon a bronze pedestal, Count Olaf Labinski beheld a sight so terrifying that in spite of his bravery he could not repress a shudder. On a black marble table lay the body of a young man, nude to the waist, and lying in the rigid immobility of death. Not a drop of blood flowed from his torso, which was stuck as full of darts as that of Saint Sebastian. He might have been taken for a coloured representation of a martyr, the lips of whose wounds had not been tinted with red.

"That strange physician," said Olaf to himself, "is perchance a worshipper of Siwa, and this is a victim offered up to his idol."

"He does not suffer in the least. You may prick him without fear; not a muscle will move," said the doctor as he drew the darts from the body, just as pins are taken from a pin-cushion.

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A few rapid passes with the hands freed the patient from the network of effluvia in which he was imprisoned, and he woke with an ecstatic smile on his lips as if emerging from a dream of delight. Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau dismissed him with a wave of the hand, and the youth withdrew by a small door cut in the wainscotting of the alcove.

"I could have cut off his leg or his arm without his being aware of it," went on the physician, wrinkling his lips by way of a smile. "I did not do so because I have not yet got the length of creating, and because man, inferior in this respect to the lizard, is not yet sufficiently vigorous to grow new limbs in the room of those he loses. But if I cannot create, on the other hand I can make young again."

As he said these words, he took off the veil which covered an aged woman sunk in a magnetic sleep in an arm-chair, not far from the black marble table. Her features, which had no doubt once been beautiful, were wasted, and the ravages of time were plainly discernible in the emaciated outlines of her arms, her shoulders, and her bosom.

The doctor fixed upon her for a few moments, with obstinate intensity, the glance of his blue eyes. Then

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the sunken lines filled out, the contours of the bosom resumed their virginal roundness, the hollows in the neck turned into white, satiny flesh; the cheeks rounded out and were covered with a peach-like bloom, the bloom of youth; the eyes opened and sparkled in a living fluid; the mask of old age, removed as by magic, allowed the long vanished beauty of the young woman to be seen again.

"Do you think the Fountain of Youth poured out its waters anywhere?" asked the doctor of the Count, who stood amazed at the metamorphosis. "I think it did, for man invents nothing, and every one of his dreams is a guess or a remembrance. But let us drop that frame remoulded for a time by my will, and let us consult the young woman sleeping quietly in yonder corner. Question her; you will find she knows more than did the sybils and pythias. You may send her to any one of your seven castles in Bohemia, ask her what is contained in the most secret of your drawers, and she will tell you, for it does not take her spirit more than a second to traverse the distance; not a very surprising thing, for the matter of that, since electricity travels two hundred and ten thousand miles in the same space of time, and electricity is to thought as a cab is

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to a railway train. Take her hand so as to place yourself in communication with her. You need not formulate your question; she can read it in your mind."

The girl, in a voice as colourless as that of a shadow, replied to the unspoken question put by the Count.

"In the cedar casket there is a piece of earth dusted with fine sand on which is the imprint of a small foot."

"Has she guessed right?" asked the doctor carelessly, and as if sure of the somnambulist's infallibility.

A deep blush covered the Count's features. It was a fact that in the early days of his love he had taken from one of the walks in a park the print of Prascovia's foot, and he kept it like a relic in a box of the most precious workmanship, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver, the tiny key of which he wore on his neck hung from a Venice chain.

Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, who was a well-bred man, noted the Count's embarrassment, and, without waiting for an answer to his question, led him to a table on which was placed a cup of water as clear as diamond.

"No doubt you have heard of the magic mirror in which Mephistopheles showed Faustus the image of Helen; now, although my silk stocking does not con-

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ceal a cloven foot and I do not wear two cock's feathers in my hat, I can regale you with that simple prodigy. Bend over this cup and think intently of the person whom you wish to see. Living or dead, near by or far off, she will answer your call, whether from the ends of the world or the depths of history."

The Count bent over the cup, the water in which soon changed colour as he gazed, and became opaline as though a drop of essence had been poured into it. The vase became rimmed with the iridescent colours of the prism, forming a frame for the picture which already began to show within the whitish cloudiness.

The mist vanished. A young woman in a lace wrapper, with sea-green eyes and wavy golden hair, her lovely hands playing like white butterflies upon the ivory keys of the piano, showed as in a mirror at the bottom of the water, that had resumed its limpidity, and so marvellously perfect that she would have driven every painter to despair. It was Prascovia Labinski, who, unknowing it, obeyed the passionate evocation of the Count.

"And now let us pass to something stranger," said the physician, as he took the Count's hand and placed it upon one of the iron rods in the mesmeric bucket.

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No sooner had Olaf touched the metal rod, charged with lightning-like electricity, than he fell as if smitten by a thunderbolt.

The physician took him up in his arms, lifted him as if he had been a feather, placed him on a divan, rang the bell, and said to the servant who appeared at the door : —

" Go and fetch Mr. Octavius de Saville."

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VI

THE sound of a coupé was heard in the silent court-yard of the mansion, and almost immediately Octavius presented himself before the doctor. He was thunderstruck when Dr. Cherbonneau showed him Count Olaf Labinski stretched out upon a divan and apparently dead. His first thought was that a murder had been committed, and for a few moments he remained speechless with horror, but closer examination showed him that the young sleeper's breast rose and fell with an almost imperceptible respiration.

"There," said the physician, "is your disguise all ready for you. It is somewhat more difficult to put on than a costume hired from Babin, but Romeo, when he scaled Juliet's balcony, did not think of the danger he ran of breaking his neck, knowing that Juliet was awaiting him above in her nightrobe; surely Countess Prascovia Labinski is worth as much at least as the daughter of the Capulets."

Octavius, overcome by the strangeness of the situation, made no answer, but kept looking at the Count,

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whose head, slightly thrown back, rested on a pillow, so that he resembled an effigy of a knight lying on a tomb in a Gothic cloister, with a carved marble pillow under its stiff neck. In spite of himself, the noble and handsome form he was about to rob of its soul, inspired him with remorse.

The doctor mistook Octavius' thoughtfulness for hesitancy, and a faint smile of contempt flickered on his lips.

"If your mind is not made up," he said, "I can awaken the Count, who will leave as he came, wondering at my magnetic power; but pray remember that such an opportunity may never again recur. At the same time, however much I may be interested in your love affair, and however desirous I am of trying an experiment never yet attempted in Europe, I am bound to tell you that there is a certain amount of danger in this transference of souls. Search your breast and question your own soul. Do you freely stake your life on this last card? Love is as strong as death, says the Bible."

"I am ready," quietly replied Octavius.

"That is right, young man," exclaimed the doctor, rubbing his wrinkled brown hands together with ex-

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traordinary rapidity, as if he had been trying to make a fire after the manner of savages. "A love that hesitates at nothing pleases me. There are but two things in this world: love and will. It certainly shall not be my fault if you are not made happy. Ah! my old Brahma-Loghum, you shall now see from the depths of Indra's heaven, where the apsaras surround you in voluptuous groups, whether I have forgotten the irresistible formula you whispered in my ear as you cast away your mummified frame. Words and gestures, I have retained them all. And now, to work! to work! I shall make a strange stew in my caldron, like the witches in Macbeth, but without the wretched witchcraft of the North.—Seat yourself before me in that arm-chair, and abandon yourself trustfully to my power. That is right; your eyes fixed on mine and your hands in my hands.—The spell is already working; he is losing the notion of time and space; self-consciousness vanishes; his eyelids are closing; his nerves, no longer receiving the orders of the brain, are relaxing; his thoughts are slumbering, and every delicate fibre that binds the soul to the body is loosened. Brahma himself, in the golden egg wherein he dreamed for twice five thousand years, was not more separated from ex-

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ternal things. Now let me saturate him in effluvia and bathe him in rays."

As he muttered these broken words, the doctor did not for a moment intermit his passes, and from his outstretched hands flashed luminous jets that smote the brow or the heart of his patient, around whom was little by little forming a sort of visible atmosphere, that was phosphorescent like a halo.

"That is good, very good," said Dr. Cherbonneau, applauding his own work. "He is in just the condition I want him. Come, come; what is it that still resists in that corner?" he cried after a pause, and as if he were reading through Octavius' brain the dying effort of the individuality about to be destroyed. "What is that rebellious thought, which, driven from the convolutions of the brain, tries to avoid my influence by clinging to the primitive monad, to the central point of life? I know how to catch and conquer it."

To overcome this involuntary revolt, the physician recharged even more powerfully than before the magnetic battery of his glance, and reached the rebellious thought between the base of the cerebellum and the insertion of the spinal marrow, the most secret sanc-

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tuary, the most mysterious tabernacle of the soul. His triumph was complete.

Then he prepared himself with majestic solemnity for the incredible experiment he was about to attempt. He put on a linen robe, as if he were a mage; washed his hands in perfumed water; drew from various boxes powders with which he made hieratic marks on his cheeks and brow; wound round his arm the Brahminic cord; read two or three slokas from the sacred poems, and omitted none of the minute rites recommended by the sannyasi of the caves of Elephanta.

Having completed these ceremonies, he opened wide the hot-air registers, so that ere long the room was full of a burning atmosphere that would have made the tigers of the jungle pant, the crust of mud on the rough backs of the buffaloes crack, and the great flower of the aloe explode into bloom.

"The two sparks of divine fire which will presently be nude and freed for a few seconds from their mortal envelopes, must not pale or die in our icy air," said the doctor as he looked at the thermometer, which at that moment was up to one hundred and twenty degrees Fahrenheit.

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Standing between the two inert bodies, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, in his white robes, looked like a priest of one of those sanguinary creeds that cast the bodies of men on the altars of their gods. He recalled the priest of Vitziliputzili, the grim Mexican idol, of which Heinrich Heine speaks in one of his ballads, but his intentions were assuredly more peaceable.

He drew near Count Olaf Labinski, who remained motionless, and uttered the ineffable syllable, which he then rapidly proceeded to repeat over Octavius, who was in a sound sleep. The ordinarily eccentric figure of Dr. Cherbonneau was at this moment singularly majestic; the sense of the mighty power at his command ennobled his jumbled features, and had any one seen him performing these rites with sacerdotal gravity, he would not have recognised in him the Hoffmannic physician who challenged, though at the same time he defied, the caricaturist's pencil.

Strange things then occurred: Octavius de Saville and Count Olaf Labinski seemed to feel simultaneously the throes of the dying, their faces were greatly altered, a light froth rose to their lips, the pallor of death overlaid their complexion, while two little bluish, trembling points of light sparkled uncertainly above their heads.

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In response to a commanding gesture of the doctor's, who seemed to indicate the road they were to follow through the air, the two luminous points moved on, leaving behind them a wake of light, and proceeded to their new homes. The soul of Octavius entered the body of Count Labinski; that of Count Olaf penetrated into that of Octavius; the avatar was accomplished.

A slight colour rising to the cheek-bones showed that life had re-entered the human clay that had remained soulless for a few seconds, and that would have fallen a prey to the Dark Angel but for the physician's power.

Dr. Cherbonneau's blue eyes blazed with the exultation of triumph, and he said to himself, as he strode up and down the room: "Let the most famous physicians do as much, they who are so proud of being able to repair the human mechanism when it gets out of order. Hippocrates, Galen, Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Boerhaave, Rasori, one and all, the meanest Hindoo fakir crouching on the steps of a pagoda knows a thousand times more than you. What matters the body when one can command the spirit?"

As he ended his peroration, Dr. Cherbonneau leaped for delight, and danced round like the mountains in

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King Solomon's Sir-Hasirim; indeed, he very nearly fell on his nose, his foot having tripped in the folds of his Brahminical robe. This slight accident recalled him to himself and restored all his calm.

"Let me waken my sleepers," said he, after having wiped off the coloured powder marks he had made on his face, and put away his Brahmin dress. Standing in front of the body of Count Labinski, now inhabited by the soul of Octavius, he made the passes necessary to draw him from the state of somnambulism, and at every pass he shook his fingers, heavy with the fluid he drew away.

In a few minutes Octavius-Labinski — for so I shall call him for the sake of clearness — sat up, passed his hand over his eyes, and cast around him a look of amazement which was as yet unillumined by the consciousness of his new being. When he at last managed to perceive things clearly, the first thing he saw was his own body lying on a divan beyond him. He beheld himself, not merely reflected as in a mirror, but actually. He uttered a cry, which did not sound like his own voice and startled him, for the transference of souls having been effected during his magnetic sleep, he had no remembrance of it and experienced strange

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discomfort. His thought, served by different organs, was like a workman who has been given new tools in exchange for those with which he was familiar. His bewildered soul beat with restless wings against the walls of that unknown cranium, and lost itself in the convolutions of the brain, in which still lingered some traces of foreign ideas.

"Well," said the doctor, when he had sufficiently enjoyed the surprise of Octavius-Labinski, "what think you of your new home? Is your soul comfortable in the body of that handsome cavalier, hetman, hospodar, or magnate, the husband of the most beautiful woman in the world? You do not feel like letting yourself die as you did the first time I saw you in your apartment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, now that the doors of the Labinski mansion stand wide open before you, and that you no longer fear that Prascovia will close your lips with her hand as she did in the Villa Salviati, when you desire to speak to her of your love! You see that old Balthazar Cherbonneau, with his ape-like face, that he might exchange for any other, were he so minded, has not a few pretty good recipes up his sleeve."

"Doctor," replied Octavius-Labinski, "you have the power of a god or of a fiend, at the least."

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"Be not in the least degree alarmed; there is no devilment in all this, and your eternal salvation is in no wise endangered. I have no intention of making you sign a contract with your blood. What has taken place is the simplest thing possible. The Word that created the light can surely transfer a soul, and if men would only listen to God through time and space, they would do a good deal more, I can tell you."

"What amount of gratitude, of devotion, do I not owe you for this priceless service!"

"You owe me nothing at all. I became interested in you, and to an old Lascar like myself, burned by every sun, and steeled by events, to feel an emotion is a rare thing. You have revealed love to me, and you know that we dreamers, who are something of alchemists, something of wizards, and something of philosophers, are all more or less in quest of the absolute. But pray rise, move and walk about, and see whether your new skin does not feel tight here and there."

Octavius-Labinski obeyed the doctor's directions, and walked round the room a few times. He already felt less strange; though inhabited by another soul, the Count's body still felt the impulse of its former habits,

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and the new guest relied upon these physical remembrances, for it was needful that he should assume the gait, the ways, and the gestures of the body's former owner.

"If I had not myself performed but now the transfer of your souls," said Dr. Cherbonneau with a laugh, "I could swear nothing out of the way had occurred this evening, and I should take you for the genuine, legitimate, and authentic Lithuanian Count Olaf Labinski, whose *ego* is still slumbering in yonder chrysalis that you have so contemptuously cast off. But it will soon be midnight; you had better be off, or Prascovia will scold you and accuse you of preferring baccarat or lansquenet to herself. You must not begin your wedded life with a quarrel; that would be a bad omen. Meanwhile I shall busy myself awaking your former frame with all the care and attention it deserves."

Perceiving the wisdom of the physician's remarks, Octavius-Labinski hastened out. At the foot of the steps were impatiently prancing the Count's splendid bay horses, which had covered the pavement with foam as they champed their bits. At the sound of the young man's steps, a splendid footman in green livery, of

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the lost race of the heyducs, sprang to the carriage steps and let them down noisily. Octavius, who had started mechanically in the direction of his own modest brougham, settled himself in the great, splendid coupé, and told the footman, who passed the word to the coachman: "Home!" Scarcely was the carriage door shut when the curveting horses started off, while the worthy successor of the Almanzors and Azolans hung on to the broad braided bands with an agility that one would not have expected from so tall a man.

To such horses the distance between the Rue du Regard and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré is a mere trifle; they covered it in a few moments, and the coachman called out in a stentorian voice, "Gate!" The porter threw back the two huge leaves of the gate; the carriage passed through, and circling round a great sanded court, stopped with remarkable precision under an awning striped red and white. The court itself, as Octavius-Labinski noted with that rapidity of vision one acquires on certain solemn occasions, was vast, surrounded by symmetrical buildings, and lighted by bronze lamp-posts, the gas jets of which were in glass shades similar to those that formerly were used in the decoration of the Bucentaur. The court had more

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the appearance of belonging to a palace than to a private mansion; orange trees in boxes, and worthy of figuring on the terrace at Versailles, were placed at regular intervals along the asphalt border that framed in the central sanded space.

The poor transformed lover, as he stepped upon the threshold, had to stop for a moment and to put his hand to his heart to stop its beating. He had indeed the body of Count Labinski, but that only. Every thought the brain had contained had fled with the soul of the former owner; the dwelling that was henceforth to be his own was unknown to him, and he was not acquainted with the internal arrangements of it. A stair faced him; he ascended it, trusting to luck, and prepared, if he made a mistake, to ascribe it to absent-mindedness.

The well-rubbed steps were dazzlingly white and set off the rich red of the Wilton carpet, held fast by gilded brass rods, that formed a soft way for the feet; flower-stands filled with exotic flowers stood on every step. A huge lamp traceried and open-worked, and hung from a heavy cord of purple silk, adorned with knots and tufts, sent shimmers of gold upon the walls covered with white stucco, polished like marble, and

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cast floods of light upon a replica, by the sculptor himself, of one of Canova's most famous groups, "Love embracing Psyche."

The landing-place of the only story was paved with mosaics of precious workmanship, and on the walls, suspended by silken cords, were four paintings by Paris Bordone, Bonifazzio, Palma Vecchio, and Paolo Veronese, the pompous architectural style of which harmonised with the magnificence of the stairs.

From this landing-place opened a high door, covered with serge set off by gilded nails. Octavius-Labinski pushed it open and found himself in a vast antechamber where were dozing a dozen footmen in full livery; as he entered they rose as if moved by springs, and stood ranged along the walls, impassible as Oriental slaves.

He went on into a white and gold drawing-room next to the antechamber. There was no one there. Octavius rang the bell, and a maid appeared.

"Can her ladyship receive me?"

"Her ladyship is undressing just now, but she will see your lordship in a moment."

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VII

LEFT alone with the body of Octavius de Saville, now inhabited by the soul of Count Olaf Labinski, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau set about restoring life to the inert shape. After a few passes, Olaf-de Saville — I must be allowed to conjoin these two names in order to designate the dual nature of the person — emerged like a phantom from the limbo of the deep sleep, or catalepsy rather, which had held him, motionless and rigid, in the corner of the divan. He rose with an automatic motion yet undirected by his will, and staggered under the influence of the last effects of vertigo. Everything was turning around him; the incarnations of Vishnu were dancing a saraband upon the walls, and the figure of the old physician appeared under the form of the old sannyasi of Elephanta, waving his arms like the wings of a bird and rolling his blue eyes in orbs of brown wrinkles that looked like the frames of goggles. The strange sights he had beheld before falling into the magnetic trance were reacting upon his mind, and he

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was returning but slowly to reality; he was like a sleeper suddenly awaking from a nightmare, and who still mistakes for spectres his clothes scattered upon the chairs, with a vague resemblance to human shapes, and the shining brass hooks of the curtains illumined by the reflection of the night-light, for the eyes of Cyclops.

Gradually the fanciful sight vanished and everything resumed its normal appearance. Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau was no longer a Hindoo penitent, but an ordinary doctor of medicine, smiling in the most commonplace way upon his patient.

"Are you satisfied, Count, with the few experiments I have had the pleasure of performing before you?" he asked in a tone of obsequious humility, in which a trace of irony might have been discerned. "I venture to hope you will not think your evening wasted, and that you will leave me convinced that all that is told of magnetism is not merely lies and trickery, as official science maintains."

Olaf-de Saville nodded in assent, and left the room accompanied by Dr. Cherbonneau, who bowed deeply to him at every door. The brougham came up to the entrance, shaving the steps, and the soul of the husband

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of the Countess Labinski got into it without paying particular attention to the fact that it was neither the Labinski carriage nor the Labinski livery.

The coachman inquired whither he should drive.

"Home," replied Olaf-de Saville, vaguely surprised at not recognising the voice of his green-coated footman, who usually asked that question in a most pronounced Hungarian accent.

The brougham in which he found himself was lined with dark blue damask, while his own coupé was lined with buttercup yellow satin. The Count was struck by the difference, while accepting the fact as one does in dreams with customary objects that present themselves under widely different aspects, though they remain recognisable. He also felt himself shorter than usual; besides, he thought he had been in evening dress when he went to the physician's, yet now, though he had no recollection of having changed, he was dressed in a light summer coat that had never figured in his wardrobe. His mind suffered from strange discomfort, and his thoughts, so lucid that morning, were difficult to clear up. Attributing this strange condition to the extraordinary things he had beheld that evening, he ceased thinking about it, rested

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his head in the corner of the carriage, and let himself float away into a vague reverie, a half-dozing state, which was neither sleep nor waking.

The sudden pulling up of the horse and the coachman's call of "Gate!" recalled him to himself. He lowered the window, put his head out, and saw by the light of the gas lamp an unknown street and a house which was not his own.

"Where the devil are you driving me to, you fool?" he cried. "This is not the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Labinski House."

"Beg your pardon, sir," grumbled the coachman; "I had mistaken your directions."

And he drove off to the place indicated.

On the way the transfigured Count asked himself a number of questions to which he could give no satisfactory answers. How was it that his carriage had left without him, when he had given orders that it should wait? How did he happen to be in another man's carriage? He supposed that a slight touch of fever interfered with the clearness of his perceptions, or that perhaps the thaumaturgist doctor had made him breathe during his sleep, in order to make a deeper impression upon his credulity, a vial of hasheesh or

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other intoxicating drug, the illusions caused by which would be dispelled by a night's sleep.

The carriage reached the Labinski mansion, but the porter, on being called, refused to open the gate, saying that there was no reception that evening, that the Count had been home for more than an hour, and that the Countess had retired to her apartments.

"Are you drunk or mad, you rascal?" cried Olaf-de Saville, as he sprang at the colossus who stood huge upon the threshold of the half-opened gate, like one of those bronze statues, told of in Arab tales, that prevent knights-errant from entering enchanted castles.

"It is you, my little man, that are drunk or mad," replied the porter, whose naturally crimson face turned purple with anger.

"You scoundrel," roared Olaf-de Saville; "but for my own self-respect —"

"You hold your tongue, or I'll smash you and throw out the pieces on the pavement," returned the giant. "It is of no use to turn nasty with me just because you have drunk one or two bottles of champagne too many."

Olaf-de Saville, exasperated, shoved the porter so roughly that he made good his ingress into the court.

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Some of the footmen who had not yet gone to bed hurried up at the sound of the dispute.

"I dismiss you, you fool, you scoundrel, you rascal! I shall not allow you to remain the night. Away with you, or I shall kill you like a mad dog. Do not compel me to shed a low-born lackey's blood."

And the Count, dispossessed of his own body, sprang, with bloodshot eyes, foaming lips, and clenched fists, at the huge porter, who, catching in his one hand the two hands of his aggressor, almost crushed them in the grip of his short fingers, muscular and knotty like those of a mediæval torturer.

"Come, keep quiet," said the giant, good-natured at bottom, and who had nothing to dread from his assailant, whom he jerked now and then to force him to behave. "What is the sense of getting into such a state, when one is dressed like a gentleman, and of coming to kick up such a row at night in a respectable house? Good wine commands respect, and it must have been prime liquor that you got drunk on. That is why I do not break your head for you, and why I shall be satisfied with chucking you into the street, where the watch will pick you up if you keep up your racket. A little cooling in the jug will do you no harm."

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"Wretches," cried Olaf-de Labinski; "is this how you allow this infamous scoundrel to insult your master, the noble Count Labinski?"

The servants hooted unanimously on hearing this name, and a vast, Homeric, irresistible laugh broke from all the braided breasts.

"The poor fellow thinks he is Count Labinski! Ha! ha! ho! ho! that is a good joke!"

A cold sweat broke out on Olaf-de Saville's face; a sharp thought flashed through his brain like a steel blade, and he felt himself grow cold to the marrow. Had Smarra pressed its knee upon his breast, or was he really alive? Had his reason disappeared within the sombre sea of magnetism, or was he the plaything of some abominable machination? None of his lackeys, so trembling, submissive, and humble in his presence, seemed to recognise him. Had his body been changed for him like his clothes and his carriage?

"You may be quite sure you are not Count Labinski," said one of the most insolent in the crowd; "for look yonder, there he comes himself, attracted by the row you have been making."

The porter's prisoner looked to the end of the court and saw standing under the awning a young man of

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slender and elegant stature, with an oval face, black eyes, aquiline nose, and slight mustache, who was no other than himself or his double, modelled by the devil, and so like as utterly to deceive one.

The porter released his hands; the footmen respectfully drew up against the wall, eyes down, hands by their sides, absolutely motionless, like icoglans when a pasha approaches. They were paying to the phantom the honours they refused to the real Count.

Prascovia's husband, bold as a Slav though he was, and there are none bolder, felt indescribable terror at the approach of that Dromio, who, more terrible than his stage compeer, mingled in real life and rendered his twin unrecognisable. His terror was increased by the recollection of a family legend that came back to his memory. Every time a Labinski was about to die, he was warned of the fact by the apparition of a phantom identically like unto him. Among Northern nations, it has always been held that for a man to see his double, even in a dream, is an omen of death, so that the intrepid warrior of the Caucasus, at the sight of this external vision of himself, was filled with invincible superstitious horror, and while he would not have hesitated to plunge his arm into the muzzle

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of a cannon ready to be fired, he drew back from himself.

Octavius-Labinski drew near his former body, in which the Count's soul was struggling and shivering with indignation, and said to it in a tone of haughty and icy politeness: —

"Sir, cease to lower yourself by disputing with my servants. If you wish to see me, I am at home from twelve to two in the day, and the Countess receives on Thursdays the persons who have had the honour of being presented to her."

Having spoken these words slowly and with due accent on every syllable, the sham Count withdrew quietly and the doors closed behind him.

The footmen placed in his carriage Olaf-de Saville, who had fainted. When he recovered his senses, he was lying on a bed that was not of the shape of his own, in a room in which he could not recollect having ever entered, and by him was a strange servant holding his head and making him breathe ether.

"Are you better, sir?" asked John of the Count, whom he took for his master.

"Yes," replied Olaf-de Saville; "it was but a passing faintness."

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"Shall I go now, sir, or sit up?"

"Do not sit up; leave me alone. Only, before you go, relight the candles by the mirror."

"Will not the bright light keep you from sleeping, sir?"

"Not in the least; besides, I am not sleepy yet."

"I shall not go to bed, sir, and if you happen to need anything, I shall be with you as soon as you ring," said John, inwardly disturbed by the pallor and the altered features of the Count.

When John had withdrawn after lighting the candles, the Count sprang to the mirror, and in the deep, clear crystal in which quivered the scintillation of the lights, he saw a young, gentle, sad face, with long black hair, dark blue eyes, pale cheeks, covered with a light downy, silky, brown beard, a head that was not his own, and that looked at him out of the mirror with an air of wonderment.

At first he tried to believe that some practical joker had framed a face in the brass and mother-of-pearl inlaid frame of the bevelled mirror; but on passing his hand over the back, he felt only the boards of the wainscotting. There was no one there.

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His hands, which he felt, were thinner, longer, and more veined; on the ring finger stood out a large gold ring set with aventurine, on which was engraved a coat of arms — a shield fasced gules and argent, and above it a baron's coronet. This ring had never belonged to the Count, whose arms were or, an eagle displayed, beaked and armed of the same, with the pearl coronet on top. He looked through his pockets, and found a note-book containing visiting-cards with the name Octavius de Saville engraved upon them.

The laughter of the domestics at his mansion, the apparition of his double, the unknown face substituted for his own reflection in the mirror, might have been, after all, but hallucinations of a diseased brain, but the different clothes, the ring on his finger, were patent, palpable, material proofs which it was impossible to reject. A complete metamorphosis had taken place in him without his being aware of it; some wizard, unquestionably, a demon, perchance, had robbed him of his form, his rank, his name, his whole individuality, and had left him but his soul without the means of manifesting it.

The fantastic stories of Peter Schlemyl and of Saint

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Sylvester's Eve returned to his mind, but the characters in the tales of Lamotte-Fouqué and Hoffmann had lost merely, the one his shadow, the other his reflection, and even if the strange lack of a projection enjoyed by every one else gave rise to odd suspicions, no one at least denied that these men were themselves. His condition was far worse. He could not claim his title of Count Labinski under the form in which he was imprisoned. Everybody would take him for an impudent impostor or for a madman at the very least. His wife herself would not recognise him in that lying garb. What means had he of proving his identity? Undoubtedly there were numberless private circumstances, innumerable secret details unknown to any one else which, were he to recall them to Prascovia, would enable her to recognise her husband's soul in that disguise, but what would be the value of that single acknowledgment, supposing he succeeded in obtaining it, in the face of unanimous opinion to the contrary? He was really and completely dispossessed of his own self. Then he had another cause of anxiety. Did the metamorphosis confine itself to an external change in his height and his features, or was he in truth dwelling in another man's body? In that case, what had become

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of his own? Had it been thrown into a pit with quick-lime, or had it been appropriated by some bold thief? The double he had seen at the Labinski mansion might be a spectre, a vision, but it might also be a living being, installed in the frame which the fakir-looking physician, with his infernal skill, had robbed him of.

A hideous thought, that stung him like an adder's bite, occurred to him: "That fictitious Count Labinski, made in my likeness by the hands of the fiend, that vampire who now inhabits my mansion, whom my servants obey even against me, may be at this very moment entering with his cloven hoof into that room which I have never entered without feeling the same emotion as on the first night, and Prascovia may be gently smiling at him, and bending with divine blushes her lovely head upon that shoulder of his, branded with the devil's own sign-manual, — believing that that lying larva, that ghoul, that empusa, that hideous child of night and hell is myself! Why should I not run to the mansion, set fire to it, and shout through the flames to Prascovia: "You are being deceived. It is not your beloved Olaf whom you are pressing to your heart! You are about to commit innocently an abomi-

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nable crime, that my despairing soul will remember even when eternity wearies of turning over its hour-glass!"

The hot blood surged to the Count's brain; he uttered inarticulate cries of rage; he bit his fists and stormed round the room like a wild beast. Madness had nearly destroyed the dim self-consciousness he had left. He ran to Octavius' dressing-table, filled a basin with water, plunged his head into it and drew it out steaming.

He recovered his coolness, and said to himself that the days of witchcraft and magic were past; that death alone can part the body and the soul; that it was impossible to kidnap in such a fashion, in the very centre of Paris, a Polish Count with a millionaire's balance at Rothschild's; one who was allied to the greatest houses, the beloved husband of a fashionable lady, a nobleman who wore the star of the first class of the order of Saint Andrew; that the whole business was no doubt a practical joke in very bad taste played upon him by Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, which could be explained in the most natural way possible, like the terrors in Anne Radcliffe's novels.

As he was nearly dead of fatigue, he threw himself

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down on Octavius' bed and slept a heavy, deep, death-like sleep, from which he had not aroused when John, thinking his master must have awakened, came in with the letters and morning papers.

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VIII

THE Count opened his eyes and cast a comprehensive glance around him. He saw a comfortable, though simple bedroom; a spotted carpet, imitating a leopard's skin, covered the floor; tapestry curtains, just drawn aside by John, hung by the windows and concealed the doors; the walls were hung with plain velvety green paper in imitation of cloth, a clock, formed of a single block of black marble, with a platinum dial, surmounted by an oxidised silver reduction by Barbedienne of the statuette of Diana of Gabies, and flanked by two antique cups, also of silver, adorned the mantel of the white, blue-veined, marble chimneypiece. The Venetian mirror in which the Count had discovered the evening before that he no longer owned his customary face, and the portrait of an old woman, by Flandrin, — no doubt that of Octavius' mother, — were the only ornaments of the somewhat gloomy and sober room. A divan, an easy-chair by the chimney, a desk, covered with papers and books, furnished it comfortably, but

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in no wise recalled the splendours of the Labinski residence.

"Are you going to rise, sir?" said John, in the soft voice he had studied to acquire during the time Octavius had been ill, and presenting to the Count the coloured shirt, the flannel trousers, and the Algerian gandoura which his master was in the habit of wearing in the morning. Although the Count disliked wearing a stranger's clothes, he had to accept those brought in by the servant, if he did not want to go nude; so he stepped down upon the silky black bear-robe placed by the bedside.

He dressed quickly, and John, who apparently had not the least doubt of the identity of the fictitious Octavius de Saville whom he was helping to dress, said to him:—

"At what time will you have breakfast, sir?"

"At the usual time," replied the Count, who, in order to be free to take such steps as he might determine upon for the recovery of his individuality, had resolved to accept, as far as outward seeming went, his incomprehensible metamorphosis.

The servant withdrew, and Olaf-de Saville opened the two letters that had been brought with the papers,

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hoping to learn something from them. The first contained friendly reproofs, and complained of a causeless break in pleasant comradeship. It was signed with a name unknown to the Count. The second was from Octavius' lawyer and urged him to draw the amount of a quarter's income, long since paid in, or to give instructions, at least, as to the manner in which he desired the sum, at present lying useless, to be invested.

"It would seem," said the Count to himself, "that the Octavius de Saville whose body I am inhabiting, very much against my will, does really exist. He is no mere creation of the fancy; he has rooms, friends, a lawyer, an income, all that constitutes the existence and social position of a gentleman. And yet I am sure that I am Count Labinski."

But a single glance at the mirror sufficed to convince him that no one else would share that belief. In the bright light of day, as in the less brilliant light of the candles, the reflection given back was one and the same.

At this moment John entered, announcing Mr. Alfred Humbert, who came into the room with the familiarity of an old friend, without waiting until the man had returned with his master's answer.

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"Good-morning," said the new-comer, a handsome young fellow with a frank, cordial look. "What are you doing with yourself? Are you dead or alive? you go nowhere and you leave my letters unanswered. I ought really to cut you, but I own that in matters of friendship I have no self-love, so I have come to inquire after you; for, devil take it, a man cannot let his old school chum die of melancholy in rooms as gloomy as Charles V's cell in the Yuste monastery.

"You fancy you are ill, but you are merely bored; so I mean to compel you to have a change, and I am going to take you, whether you will or not, to a jolly breakfast given by Gustave Raimbaud before he abdicates the freedom of bachelorhood."

And while saying this in a tone half of annoyance, half of amusement, he vigorously shook, in English fashion, the hand of the Count.

"Excuse me," replied the Count, entering into the spirit of his part, "I am worse to-day than usual, and do not feel up to the breakfast. I should only cast a damper on the company and be in the way."

"Well, I must say you do look pale and tired out. So be it, then; and let us look forward to another opportunity. I must be off, for I am three dozen

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green oysters and one bottle of Sauterne late," said Alfred Humbert as he walked to the door. "Raimbaud will be sorry not to see you."

The visit increased the Count's wretchedness. John took him for his master, and Alfred for his friend. But one last test had to be gone through with. The door opened, and a lady, whose hair was streaked with silver, entered. She was strikingly like the portrait hanging on the wall. She sat down on the divan, and said to the Count: —

"How are you to-day, my poor Octavius? John told me you had come home last night in an alarming state of weakness. Do take care of yourself, my dear son, for you know how much I love you, in spite of the grief caused me by that inexplicable sadness the secret of which you will not confide to me."

"Do not fear, mother," replied Olaf de Saville. "It is nothing, and I feel much better to-day."

Madame de Saville, reassured, rose and went out, desiring not to trouble her son, whose dislike to be disturbed in his solitude by a prolonged call she was aware of.

"I am unquestionably Octavius de Saville," cried the Count when the old lady had gone. "His mother

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recognises me and does not suspect that there is another soul in her son's body. I am perhaps for ever enclosed in this frame. A strange prison for the spirit is another man's body! Yet it is hard to give up being Count Olaf Labinski; to lose my rank, my wife, my fortune, and to be condemned to a pitiful middle-class existence. But I swear that I shall rid myself of that Dejanira's robe that clings to my *ego*, and it shall be in tatters that I shall return it to its former owner. Suppose I were to go back to my home? No! I had better not; I should only make a scene, and the porter would throw me out, for I am weak as a child in that invalid's dressing-gown. But come, let me look around a little, for I must learn something of the life of that Octavius de Saville, whom I have now become."

Whereupon he tried to open the note-book, the spring of which he happened to touch, and from the pockets he drew first a number of papers, covered with a close, small handwriting, and next a square of vellum. On this square, an unskilful but correct hand had traced, with the memory of the heart and with a success not always attained even by great artists, a pencil portrait of Countess Prascovia

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Labinski, which it was impossible not to recognise at a glance.

The Count was thunderstruck at this discovery. His surprise was followed by a furious rush of jealousy. How did the Countess' portrait happen to be in that unknown young man's pocket-book? Whence did it come? Who had drawn it? Who had given it to him? Could his Prascovia, religiously worshipped by him, have descended from her heaven of love to indulge in an intrigue? By what infernal trick did he, the husband, come to be incarnated in the body of the lover of the woman he had hitherto believed so pure? He had been the husband and now he was to be the lover! That was a sarcastic metamorphosis with a vengeance; a change to drive a man mad. He would be in a position to fool himself; to be at once the betrayer and the betrayed!

These thoughts stormed tumultuously through his brain. He felt his reason leaving him, and summoned up all his strength of will to recover his self-command. Without heeding John, who came to inform him that breakfast was served, he continued his feverish examination of the mysterious pocket-book.

The papers formed a sort of psychological journal,

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left off and resumed at different times. Here are a few extracts, which the Count perused with anxious curiosity: —

"Never will she love me; never, never! I have read in her eyes that are so sweet those words than which Dante could find none more cruel for the inscription on the brazen gates of his City of Sorrows: 'All hope abandon.' What have I done to God that I should be damned alive? To-morrow, and to-morrow, it will be the same! The planets may interlace their orbits, the stars in conjunction may form knots, but my fate will remain unchanged. With a single word, she has dispelled my dream; with one gesture she has broken the wings of my fancy. The fabulous combinations of impossibilities hold no chances for me; the numbers, were they cast a million times in the wheel of fortune, would not come out to my advantage. There is no winning number for me!"

"Unfortunate wretch that I am! I know that Paradise is closed to me, and yet I remain foolishly seated on the threshold, my back against the gate, which will never open; and I weep in silence, steadily, without an effort, as if mine eyes were springs of living waters. I have not the courage to arise and to go down into

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the mighty desert or to enter into the tumultuous Babel of men."

"Sometimes, at night, when I cannot sleep, I think of Prascovia. When I do sleep, it is of her I dream. Oh! how beautiful she was that day in the garden of the Villa Salviati in Florence! Her white dress and her black ribbons, at once lovely and funereal! The white for her, the black for me! At times the ribbons, fluttering in the breeze, formed a cross upon that background of dazzling whiteness. An invisible spirit sang the Requiem Mass of my heart."

"Were some incredible catastrophe to place on my brow the crown of an Emperor or a Caliph, were the earth to pour out for me the gold of its veins, were I free to pillage at will the sparkling gems of Golconda and Vishapur, were Byron's lyre to sound under my hand, were the most perfect masterpieces of antiquity and of modern art to lend me their beauties, were I to discover a new world, I should be no better off for all that!"

"What is fate? I meant to go to Constantinople; then I should not have met her; I remained in Florence, I saw her and I am dying."

"I would have killed myself, but that she breathes

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the air in which I live, and mayhap my eager lips will drink in — oh, bliss ineffable! — a faint breath of her balmy breath. Besides, my guilty soul would have been exiled to some distant planet, and I should have lost the chance of being loved by her in another life. Dread thought! I might have been separated from her yonder: she in heaven and I in hell!"

"Why should I have fallen in love with the one and only woman who cannot feel love for me? Others, said to be beautiful, and who were free, have smiled on me with their tenderest smile and seemed to invite a confession that was never made. Oh! happy is he, her husband! What sublime anterior life did he lead that God has rewarded him with the gift of that glorious love?"

There was no need of reading more. The suspicions that had arisen in the Count's mind at the sight of the portrait, had vanished at the perusal of the first few lines of these sad confidences. He understood that the beloved face, drawn again and again, had been caressed, far from the model, with the indefatigable patience of unrequited love; that it was the Madonna of a little mystic chapel, before which knelt hopeless adoration.

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"But suppose this Octavius entered into a pact with the devil to rob me of my body, and to surprise Prascovia's love under my disguise!"

The absurdity of such a notion, in the nineteenth century, quickly caused the Count to put it aside, though it caused him considerable distress.

Smiling at his own credulity, he ate the breakfast, now cold, served by John, dressed, and called for his carriage. As soon as it was brought round, he had himself driven to Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau's; he traversed the rooms he had entered the night before under the name of Count Olaf Labinski, and whence he had gone out called Octavius de Saville by every one. The doctor was seated, as usual, on the divan at the end of the farthermost room, his foot in his hand, and apparently sunk in deep meditation.

At the sound of the Count's steps he looked up.

"Ah! it is you, my dear Octavius. I was just coming round to see you, but it is a good sign when the patient comes himself to see his doctor."

"Octavius again," said the Count. "It will drive me mad!"

Then, crossing his arms, he stood in front of the physician, and looking at him fixedly and fiercely, said:

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"You know very well, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, that I am not Octavius, but Count Olaf Labinski; for you yourself, last night, in this very place, robbed me of my body by your outlandish witchcraft."

On hearing these words the doctor broke out into a loud guffaw, threw himself back on his cushions, and held his sides with his hands to moderate his laughter.

"Repress, sir, that most untimely mirth, which you may have cause to repent. I am speaking seriously."

"So much the worse; that shows that the anæsthesia and the hypochondria for which I am treating you are turning to dementia. I shall have to change the treatment."

"I do not know, you physician of Satan, why I do not strangle you with my own hands," roared the Count, striding towards Cherbonneau.

The physician smiled at the Count's threat, and touched him with a small steel wand. Olaf-de Saville felt a terrible shock and thought his arm was broken.

"We have ways of quieting patients when they grow troublesome," said he, at the same time casting upon him the look, cold as an ice-water douche, that

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tames maniacs and compels lions to crawl on their bellies. "Go home, take a bath, and your excitement will pass away."

Olaf-de Saville, stunned by the shock, left the doctor's place, more uncertain than ever and more troubled than before. He had himself driven to Passy, to consult Dr. B——.

"I am," he said to the famous physician, "a prey to a strange hallucination. When I look at myself in the glass, my face does not appear to me with its usual features; the forms of the objects around me are changed; I recognise neither the walls nor the furniture of my room. I seem to be another person than myself."

"Under what form do you see yourself?" asked the physician. "The error may be due to the eyesight or to the brain."

"I see myself with black hair, dark blue eyes, and a pale face with a beard."

"Your description in your passport could not be more accurate. You are suffering neither from intellectual hallucination nor from disease of the sight. You are, as a matter of fact, such as you describe yourself."

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"But that is not so; naturally I have fair hair, dark eyes, tanned complexion, and a sharp-pointed mustache."

"Now," answered the physician, "we are coming upon a slight affection of the intellectual faculties."

"Yet, doctor, I am not mad!"

"No doubt; it is only those who are in full possession of their senses who call upon me. Fatigue, or excess of study or of pleasure is the cause of the disturbance. You are mistaken; the vision itself is the reality, and the notion is the fancy. Instead of being a fair-haired man who thinks himself dark, you are a dark-haired man who thinks himself fair."

"I am nevertheless sure that I am Count Olaf Labinski; yet, since yesterday, every one calls me Octavius de Saville."

"Just what I was telling you," answered the physician; "you are Mr. de Saville and you fancy you are Count Labinski, whom I remember seeing and who is, as you say, fair. That quite explains how it is you see another face than yours in the glass. That face, which is your own, does not correspond with your inward belief and it causes you surprise. Pray note that every one calls you Mr. de Saville, and consequently does not share your belief. Come and

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spend a fortnight here; bathing, resting, and walks under the trees will soon overcome your unfortunate delusion."

The Count bowed and promised to return. He knew not what to believe. He returned to the apartment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, and by chance caught sight of the Countess' invitation which Octavius had shown to Dr. Cherbonneau.

"With that talisman," he cried, "I can see her to-morrow!"

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IX

WHEN the footmen had borne to his carriage the true Count Labinski, driven from his earthly Paradise by the sham guardian angel standing on its threshold, the metamorphosed Octavius re-entered the small white and gold drawing-room to await the Countess' pleasure.

As he leaned against the white marble mantel, the hearth of which was filled with flowers, he saw himself reflected in the mirror symmetrically placed upon a pier table with carved and gilded feet. Although he was aware of the secret of his metamorphosis, or, to speak more accurately, of his transposition, he found it difficult to believe that that image, so different from his own, was the double of his figure, and he could not take his eyes off the phantom which, nevertheless, was himself. He looked at himself and saw another man. Involuntarily he turned to see whether Count Olaf was not leaning near him on the shelf of the mantel and whether it was not his reflection he saw in the mirror. He was quite alone,

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however, and Dr Cherbonneau had performed his work conscientiously.

In a few moments Octavius-Labinski ceased to think of the wonderful avatar by which his soul had passed into the body of Prascovia's husband, and his thoughts turned into a channel more suitable to his circumstances. An incredible event, which the most fantastic hope would not have ventured to dream of, even in delirium, had happened! He was about to find himself in the presence of the beauty he worshipped, and she would not repel him! The one and only combination which could conciliate his happiness and the Countess' immaculate virtue had been brought about!

At this supreme moment, he suffered in his soul dreadful anxiety and anguish. The timidity of true love made him faint as though that soul still dwelt in the rejected form of Octavius de Saville. The maid's entrance cut short the contention of his emotions. As she drew near he could not repress a nervous start, and his blood rushed back to his heart as the girl said to him: —

"Her ladyship is ready to see your lordship."

Octavius-Labinski followed the maid, for he was not acquainted with the interior arrangement of the man-

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sion, and wished not to betray his ignorance by any uncertainty in his motions.

The maid showed him into a fairly large dressing-room adorned with all the refinement of the most tasteful luxury. A number of wardrobes, in costly woods, carved by Knecht and Lienhart, the doors of which were separated by twisted pillars around which wound the spirals of light tendrils of convolvuli, with their heart-shaped leaves and their bell-like flowers, cut out with infinite skill, formed a sort of architectural wainscotting, a portico of rare elegance and marvellous execution. In these wardrobes were kept the silk and velvet gowns, the Cashmere shawls, the capes, the laces, the pelisses of zibeline marten, the many-shaped bonnets, in a word, the whole arsenal of a lovely woman.

On the opposite side of the room the same motive was repeated, save that the panels were filled with mirrors that swung on hinges, like screens, so that the owner might have a front, side, or back view of herself, and judge of the effect of her bodice or her head-dress.

On the third side stood a long toilet-table overlaid with alabaster onyx, with silver faucets that poured

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hot or cold water into immense Japanese basins set in silver; Bohemian glass bottles, that sparkled like diamonds and rubies in the light of the tapers, contained essences and scents.

The walls and the ceiling were hung with sea-green silk, like the inside of a jewel-case, while a thick Smyrna carpet, with soft harmonious tints, covered the floor.

In the centre of the room, on a pedestal of green velvet, was placed a great casket, of chased Khorassan steel, inlaid and covered with arabesques so complicated that by the side of them the ornaments of the Hall of Ambassadors in the Alhambra were simple. Eastern art seemed to have attained its highest point in that marvellous piece of work, which must have been wrought by fairy fingers. It was in this casket that Countess Labinski kept her jewels, gems worthy of a queen, but which she rarely wore, rightly thinking that they were not as beautiful as the form they covered. She was too beautiful to need gems, and her woman's instinct was correct in this respect. So she brought them out only on the solemn occasions when it was desirable that the hereditary splendours of the ancient house of Labinski

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should be manifested. Never were diamonds so seldom worn.

Near the window, the full curtains of which fell in broad folds, in front of a dressing-table, opposite a mirror held by two cherubs carved by Mlle. de Fauveau, and marked by that lissom, slender elegance characteristic of her work, sat, in the brilliant light of two candelabra with six tapers, Countess Prascovia Labinski, in all the radiance of her blooming loveliness. She wore a soft, cloud-like Tunis burnouse, of incredible fineness, striped with blue and white stripes, alternately opaque and transparent. The light stuff had slipped off the satiny shoulders and allowed to be seen the upper portion of a neck by comparison with which a swan's snowy neck would have seemed gray. Between the folds showed the lace of a cambric wrapper, a night robe fastened by no girdle. Her hair was let down and fell behind her in rich waves like an empress's cloak. Assuredly the tresses of fluid gold from which Venus Anadyomene shook pearls as she emerged in her shell like a sea-flower from the blue Ionian sea, were less fair, less thick, and less heavy. Mingle the amber of Titian and the silver of Paolo Veronese with the golden glaze of Rubens; make the sun's rays stream

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through the topaz, and you will not even then reproduce the marvellous tone of that splendid hair, which seemed to give out light, instead of reflecting it, and which deserved, more than Berenice's hair, to blaze, a new constellation, among the stars of eld. Two maids were parting, smoothing, waving, and curling it in ringlets carefully arranged so that the contact of the ear should not disturb it.

While this delicate operation was going on, the Countess was making dance, on the tip of her foot, a slipper of white velvet, embroidered with gold braid, so small that it would have made the khanouns and odalisques of the Padishah jealous. Now and then, throwing back the soft folds of the burnouse, she uncovered her white arm and pushed back with her hand a stray lock, with a movement full of arch grace.

In her nonchalant pose she recalled those lissome figures of Greek toilets that adorn antique vases and which no artist has been able to reproduce in their pure and suave contours and their youthful and delicate beauty. She was infinitely more seductive than in the garden of the Villa Salviati in Florence, and had not Octavius been madly in love with her, he would have

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now become so; happily, one can add nothing to the infinite.

At this sight Octavius-Labinski felt his knees give way under him as if he were beholding the most dread of spectacles. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, anguish clutched him by the throat like the hand of a Thug, and red flames passed before his eyes. The Countess's beauty petrified him.

He called up his courage, however, saying to himself that his bewildered, stupefied ways, while appropriate in a rejected lover, were wholly out of place in the case of a husband, however much he might be in love with his wife, and he therefore marched up to the Countess with fair resolution.

"So here you are, Olaf! How late you are to-night," said the Countess without turning round, for her head was held motionless by the four long tresses her women were busy plaiting; disengaging one of her fair hands from the folds of the burnouse, she held it out to him.

Octavius-Labinski took the hand, softer and fairer than a flower, raised it to his lips and imprinted upon it a long, ardent kiss, concentrating his whole soul upon that one little spot.

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I know not what delicate sensitiveness, what instinctive, divine modesty, what spontaneous intuition of the heart warned the Countess, but her face, neck, and arms suddenly flushed rosy red, like virgin snow on lofty summits surprised by the first kiss of the sun. She started slightly and slowly drew away her hand, half angry, half ashamed; Octavius's lips had burned her like a red-hot iron. She soon recovered, however, and smiled at her own simplicity.

"You do not answer, dear Olaf. Do you know that I have not seen you for more than six hours? You are becoming neglectful," she added in a tone of reproach. "There was a time when you would not have left me to myself for a whole evening. I wonder whether you even bestowed one thought upon me."

"I thought of no one but you," replied Octavius-Labinski.

"Of no one but me? Oh, no. I feel it when you are thinking of me, even when you are away. This evening, for instance, I was alone, seated at the piano, playing a piece of Weber's and trying to lull my solitude with music. Your soul fluttered round me for a few minutes in the sonorous harmony of the notes, and then it flew away with the last chord,

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whither I know not, and it did not return. Do not tell me any fibs; I know whereof I am speaking."

Nor was Prascovia mistaken; it was the moment when Count Olaf Labinski, in the rooms of Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, was bending over the magic vase of water and evoking the face he adored with all the strength of his will. From that moment the Count, sunk in the fathomless ocean of magnetic sleep, had remained deprived of thought, of feeling, and of will.

The maids, having finished dressing the Countess for the night, withdrew. Octavius-Labinski remained standing, casting burning looks upon Prascovia. Troubled by these hot glances, the Countess wrapped herself in her burnouse as Polyhymnia in her draperies, her head alone, with an expression of anxiety over its loveliness, showing, above the white and blue folds.

Although no human penetration could possibly have informed her of the mysterious transfer of souls brought about by Dr. Cherbonneau, thanks to the formula of the sannyasi Brahma-Loghum, Prascovia did not recognise in the eyes of Octavius-Labinski the expression she was wont to note in Olaf's eyes, — that of a pure, quiet, equable love, eternal like that of the angels.

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An earthly passion blazed in his glance, which troubled her and made her blush. She had no idea of what had occurred, but she was sure that something had happened. A thousand strange notions flashed through her brain. Had she become like unto a vulgar woman to Olaf, desired for her beauty, like a courtesan? Had the heavenly accord of their souls been broken by some dissonance she was unaware of? Did Olaf love another woman? Had the corruptions of Paris soiled his chaste heart? She asked herself these questions swiftly, unable to find a satisfactory answer to them, and saying to herself that she must be crazy, but at bottom feeling that she was right. Secret terror laid hold of her, as if she were in presence of some hidden danger revealed to her by the second sight of the soul, always to be trusted.

She rose, nervous and agitated, and walked towards her bedroom door. The sham Count accompanied her, his arm round her waist, like Othello whenever he accompanies Desdemona in one of her exits in Shakespeare's play; but when she reached the threshold, she turned, paused for a moment, white and cold as a statue, cast a frightened glance on the young man, entered, closed the door quickly, and shot the bolt.

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"It is the glance of Octavius!" she cried, falling half fainting upon a sofa. When she came to herself, she said: —

"But how is it that that glance, the expression of which I have never forgotten, should flash this evening in Olaf's eyes? How comes it that its sombre and despairing fire gleams in my husband's look? Can Octavius be dead? Is it his soul that has shone for an instant before me as if to bid me farewell before leaving this earth? Oh! if I have foolishly yielded to vain terrors, Olaf, you will surely forgive me, but if I had received you to-night, I should have felt as though I were giving myself to another man."

The Countess made sure that the bolt was firmly secured, lighted the lamp hanging from the ceiling, nestled in her bed like a frightened child, and did not fall asleep until morning. Her sleep was disturbed by incoherent and strange dreams. Ardent eyes, the eyes of Octavius, blazed upon her out of a mist, while at the foot of her bed a black, wrinkled figure remained crouching, muttering words in an unknown tongue. Count Olaf also appeared in her absurd dream, but under a form that was not his own.

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I shall not attempt to describe the disappointment of Octavius when he found himself on the wrong side of the closed door and heard the bolt shot. His last hope was destroyed. He had had recourse to strange and terrible means; he had yielded himself up to a wizard, to a fiend, mayhap, and perilled his life in this world and his soul in the next to conquer a woman who now escaped him, though delivered defenceless into his hands by Hindoo magic. Repelled as a lover he was repelled as a husband also. Prascovia's invincible purity set at naught the most infernal machinations. On the threshold of the sleeping chamber she had appeared to him as one of Swedenborg's white angels blasting the fiend.

He could not remain all night in that ridiculous situation. He therefore tried to find the Count's apartment, and, at the end of a number of rooms, he saw one in which stood a bedstead with ebony pillars and curtained with tapestry, on which, amid flowers and foliage were embroidered coats of arms. Trophies of Eastern weapons, breastplates and helmets on which fell the rays of a lamp, shone faintly in the shadows, and on the walls gleamed hangings of goffered Bohemian gilded leather. Three or four large carved arm-

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chairs, a coffer covered with figures, completed this feudal furnishing, that would not have been out of place in the great hall of a Gothic manor. It was not a frivolous imitation of the fashion of the day on the Count's part, but a pious remembrance. The room was an exact reproduction of the one he had occupied in his mother's home, and although he had often been rallied on having a sort of fifth act stage setting, he had always refused to change the style of the furniture.

Octavius-Labinski, worn out by emotion and fatigue, threw himself on the bed, and fell asleep, cursing Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau. Happily brighter thoughts came to him with daylight; he resolved to behave more sensibly, to deaden the fire of his glance, and to assume the ways of a husband. Helped by the Count's valet, he dressed in quiet fashion and went with tranquil step to the breakfast-room, where the Countess was waiting for him.

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X

OCTAVIUS-LABINSKI followed close upon the steps of the valet, for he did not know where lay the dining-room in that house of which he appeared to be the master. It was a large room on the ground-floor, opening out upon the court, in a noble and severe style that smacked both of an abbey and of a manor. A wainscotting of rich, warm, dark oak, divided symmetrically into panels and compartments, rose to the ceiling, the carved open beams of which formed sunken hexagonal panels painted blue, with light golden arabesques. In the long panels of the wainscotting Philippe Rousseau had painted the Four Seasons, symbolised, not by mythological figures, but by trophies of still life corresponding to each period of the year. These had for companion pieces hunting scenes by Jadin, while above each painting shone, like a round buckler, a huge dish by Bernard Palissy or Léonard de Limoges, or of Japanese porcelain, or of majolica, or of Arab pottery, the glaze of which was iridescent with all the colours of the prism. Heads

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of stags and wild ox alternated with the porcelains, and at the two ends of the room rose great dressers, as high as the retables of Spanish churches, of stately design and so covered with carvings as to rival the finest works of Berruguete, Cornejo Duque, and Verbruggen. On their shelves glittered the medley of the old Labinski family plate, ewers with monsters for handles, old-fashioned salt-cellars, goblets, cups, centre-pieces of strange shapes in the German fanciful taste, worthy of taking their place in the Treasury of the Grüne Gewölbe at Dresden. Opposite this old plate scintillated the wondrous products of the modern goldsmith's art, the masterpieces of Wagner, Duponchel, Froment-Meurice, Rudolphi; silver-gilt tea services with figures by Feuchère and Vechte; inlaid salvers; champagne pails with handles formed of vine leaves; braziers as elegant as Pompeian tripods, besides Bohemian crystal ware, Venetian glass, and services in old Sèvres and old Dresden china.

Oaken chairs, covered with green morocco, were ranged along the walls. The table, the feet of which were carved in the shape of eagle's talons, was lighted by a soft, even light that came through the ground glass of the central sunk panel, left undecorated for the pur-

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pose, and which was framed in by a wreath of vine leaves, the transparent green of which contrasted harmoniously with the milky whiteness of the panel itself.

On the table, set in the Russian fashion, fruits placed in a circlet of violets, were ready laid, while the meats awaited the knives of the guests under their covers of polished metal that shone like the helmets of emirs, and a Moscow samovar hissed out a jet of steam. Two lackeys, in knee-breeches and white neckties, stood motionless and silent behind the two arm-chairs that were placed opposite each other, like two statues of domesticity.

Octavius took in all these details at a glance in order not to be involuntarily preoccupied by the novelty of objects with which he was supposed to be perfectly familiar.

A sound of light footsteps on the floor and a rustle of taffeta made him turn his head: it was Countess Prascovia Labinski entering. She sat down after having nodded to him in friendly fashion. She wore a green and white checked silk wrapper, trimmed with a vandyke ruffle of the same stuff. Her thick hair fell in heavy bandeaux upon her temples and was knotted in a golden roll, like the volute of an Ionian capital, upon

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her neck, forming a head-dress as simple as it was beautiful, and which even a Greek sculptor would not have altered. Her peach-like complexion was slightly paled by the emotions of the preceding evening and by her disturbed sleep; a faint pearly aureole encircled her eyes, usually so calm and clear. She looked tired and languorous, but this softening of her beauty made it all the more seductive and human. The goddess was more of a woman; the angel, having folded its wings, had ceased to soar.

Taught prudence by experience, Octavius deadened the fire in his eyes, and masked his ecstasy under an air of indifference.

The Countess thrust her little feet, shod with reddish brown slippers, into the silky wool of the thick, soft carpet placed under the table to neutralise the chilliness of the white marble and Verona brocatello mosaic, which formed the flooring of the room; shivered slightly, as if she felt a little touch of fever, and looking with her polar blue eyes at the guest whom she believed to be her husband — for daylight had driven away the presentiments, terrors, and phantoms of night — she addressed him in a tender, harmonious voice, full of chaste endearment — but in Polish! It was her custom

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to use her beloved mother-tongue when speaking to the Count in moments of sweet intimacy, especially in presence of their French servants who were unacquainted with that language.

Now Octavius, a thoroughbred Parisian, knew Latin, Italian, Spanish, and a little English, but like all Gallo-Romans, he was utterly ignorant of Slavic tongues. The consonantal *chevaux-de-frise* which stand guard upon the rare Polish vowels would have prevented his learning the language, even had he attempted to do so. In Florence the Countess had always spoken to him in French or Italian, and it had never occurred to him to learn the tongue in which Miskiewicz almost equalled Byron. One cannot think of everything.

As he heard the words, there took place a very singular phenomenon in the Count's brain, wherein dwelt at the time Octavius' *ego*. The sounds, foreign to the Parisian, entered the windings of the Slavic ear, reached the spot where Olaf's soul was accustomed to receive and translate them into thoughts, and there awakened a sort of physical memory. Their meaning was dimly apparent to Octavius; words hidden away in the convolutions of the brain, at the bottom of the secret drawers of memory, came buzzing out, ready to reply,

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but these vague reminiscences, not being placed in communication with the mind, speedily vanished, and all was dark. Painful was the poor lover's embarrassment, for he had not thought of these complications when he had entered into the body of Count Olaf Labinski, and he realised that the man who steals another's form exposes himself to unpleasant discomfiture.

Prascovia, astonished at Octavius' silence, and taking for granted that his thoughts were wandering, repeated the remark, which she supposed he had not heard.

While he heard the sound of the words more clearly, the sham Count failed to grasp their meaning any better. He strove desperately to make out what the Countess was talking about, but to the man who is ignorant of them, the tongues of the North are absolutely unintelligible, and though a Frenchman may gather what it is that an Italian is saying to him, he is like a deaf man when addressed by a Pole. In spite of himself, a burning blush overspread his features; he bit his lips, and to save appearances, he cut viciously at the meat on his plate.

"Really, my dear lord," said the Countess, "it seems as though you did not hear or did not understand me."

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"Quite so," stammered Octavius-Labinski, not knowing what he was uttering; "that devilish tongue is so difficult."

"It may be difficult for foreigners, I grant you; but to one who learned it at his mother's knee, it is like the very breath of life, the very effluvium of thought."

"You are right; yet there are times when it seems to me that I have forgotten it."

"What are you saying, Olaf? What! *you*, forget the tongue of your forefathers, the speech of your blessed country, the tongue by which you know your brethren among men, and," she added in a lower tone, "the tongue in which you first told me that you loved me!"

"I am so used now to another tongue —" ventured Octavius-Labinski, driven into a corner.

"Olaf," replied the Countess, in a tone of reproach, "I see that Paris has spoiled you. I was right not to wish to come here. Who would have ventured to say at that time that when the noble Count Labinski returned to his estates he would be unable to reply to the congratulations of his vassals in his own language?"

An expression of grief saddened Prascovia's lovely face, and for the first time in her life sorrow cast its

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shadow over her brow pure as an angel's. The Count's amazing loss of memory hurt the deepest feelings of her soul and appeared to her almost in the light of a treason.

The breakfast ended in silence, for Prascovia was annoyed with him she took for her husband. As for Octavius, he was in torment, fearing other questions to which he would be unable to make any reply. The meal over, the Countess rose and returned to her apartments.

Octavius, left alone, played with the handle of a knife which he felt like driving into his heart, so intolerable was his position. He had reckoned on surprising the Countess, and instead he found himself involved in the closed maze of a life he knew nothing of. When he had assumed the body of Count Olaf Labinski, he now felt he ought to have also robbed him of his thoughts, of the languages he knew, of his remembrances of childhood, of the innumerable secret matters that go to the making of a man's *ego*, which are the bonds that connect his existence with that of others. But to do this even the marvellous learning of Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau would have proved insufficient. It was maddening to him to find himself in a Paradise

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the very threshold of which he had scarce dared to look at from afar; to inhabit the same dwelling as Prascovia, to see her, to speak to her, to kiss her lovely hand with her own husband's very lips, and yet to be unable to lull her sense of celestial modesty, and to go on betraying himself every minute by some amazing piece of stupidity.

"It was written above that Prascovia should never love me! yet have I made the greatest sacrifice to which human pride could consent: I have renounced my own individuality and shown myself willing to obtain, under a form that is not mine, endearments meant for another man!"

At this point his monologue was broken in upon by a groom who, bowing to him with every mark of the deepest respect, asked him what horse he proposed to ride.

As he did not reply, the groom, trembling at his own audacity, ventured to murmur: —

"Vultur or Rustem? Neither of them has been out for a week."

"Rustem," answered Octavius Labinski, as indifferently as he would have said Vultur; because it was the last name that had fallen upon his inattentive ear.

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He dressed for the ride and went off to the Bois de Boulogne to see if the air would calm his nervousness.

Rustem, a splendid animal of the Nedji breed, who wore on his breast, in an Eastern sachet, embroidered in gold, his titles of nobility that went back to the earlier years of the Hegira, needed no spur. He seemed to enter into his rider's thoughts, and, as soon as he had left the paved streets and felt the smoother ground, he went off like an arrow without Octavius having to urge him on. After a mad gallop of a couple of hours, horse and rider returned to the mansion, the one calmed down, the other steaming and with reddened nostrils.

The sham Count entered the Countess's apartments and found her in her drawing-room, dressed in a white taffeta dress flounced to the waist, and a knot of ribbons in her hair just by her ear, for it happened to be a Thursday, the day she was at home to visitors.

"Well," said she to him with a gracious smile, for she could not long keep a pout upon her lovely lips; "has your memory returned in the course of your ride in the Bois?"

"Unfortunately not, my dear," replied Octavius-Labinski. "But I have a confession to make to you."

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"Why confess to me? Do I not read all your thoughts? Are we not transparent as the day to each other?"

"Yesterday I went to see that physician of whom people are talking so much."

"I know the man; Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, who lived so long in India and there learned, it is said, from the Brahmins any number of secrets, every one more wonderful than the others. You wanted me to go with you, but I am not curious. I know you love me, and that knowledge is sufficient for me."

"He performed in my presence such strange experiments, he worked such prodigies, that my mind is even yet upset by them. That extraordinary man, who enjoys irresistible power, plunged me into so deep a magnetic sleep that when I woke I found I had not the same faculties as before. I had lost all recollection of many things; the past was shrouded in a thick mist; my love for you alone had remained unimpaired."

"You did wrong, Olaf, to submit to that man's influence. God, who created the soul, alone has the right to act upon it. When man attempts to do so, he commits an impious action," said Countess Prascovia Labinski, gravely. "I hope you will not go to

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him again, and that when I say something sweet to you — in Polish — you will understand me as you used to do."

Octavius had thought out, while out riding, this excuse of magnetic influence with a view to palliating the mistakes he was certain to heap one upon another in his new life; but he was far from being out of the wood. A servant opened the door and announced a visitor.

"Mr. Octavius de Saville."

Although he must have reckoned on such a meeting taking place before long, the real Octavius turned as pale, on hearing these simple words, as if the trumpet of judgment had suddenly sounded in his ears. He had to call up all his courage and to remember that all the advantages were on his side, in order not to stagger. Mechanically he drove his finger-nails into the back of an arm-chair, and thus managed to remain standing and apparently firm and at his ease.

Count Olaf, under the form of Octavius, approached the Countess and bowed low before her.

"Count Labinski, Mr. Octavius de Saville," said the Countess, introducing the two gentlemen to each other.

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The two men bowed coldly, exchanging fierce glances under the stony mask of mundane civility, which conceals at times the worst of passions.

"You have given me the cold shoulder since we met in Florence, Mr. Octavius," said the Countess in a voice at once friendly and familiar. "I feared I should not see you before leaving Paris. You were more assiduous at the Villa Salviati; you were one of my faithful visitors."

"Madam," replied in a constrained tone the sham Octavius, "I have been travelling; I have not been well; ill, indeed, and when I received your gracious invitation I hesitated to avail myself of it, for one must not be selfish and take advantage of the indulgence shown to a bore."

"Bored you may be, but bore one you certainly do not," replied the Countess. "You have always been melancholy, but is it not one of your own poets who says of melancholy: 'Next to idleness it is the pleasantest of ills'?"

"That is what the happy say in order to save themselves the trouble of pitying those who suffer," returned Olaf-de Saville.

The Countess cast a glance full of inexpressible

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sweetness upon the Count, concealed under Octavius' form, as if to beg his forgiveness for the love she had involuntarily inspired in him.

"You think me more frivolous than I really am. I do sympathise with every genuine sorrow, and if I cannot relieve it, I do at least share it. I wish you could have been happy, dear Mr. Octavius, but why have you shut yourself up alone with your grief, and obstinately refused life that presented itself to you with its happiness, enchantments, and duties? Why did you reject the friendship I offered you?"

These simple, frank words produced a different impression upon her two hearers. Octavius found in them the confirmation of the sentence passed upon him in the garden of the Villa Salviati, by those lovely lips that had never uttered a falsehood. Olaf, on the other hand, found in them additional proof of the unchanging virtue of his wife, who could fall only through a devilish artifice. Sudden, fierce rage filled him, therefore, at the sight of his double, animated by another soul than his own, and installed in his own house. He flew at the sham Count's throat.

"Robber, brigand, scoundrel, give me back my body!"

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On seeing his extraordinary action the Countess rang with all her might, and the servants carried away the Count.

"That poor Octavius has gone mad," said the Countess, while Olaf, who was in vain struggling, was being led away.

"Yes, mad with love," replied the real Octavius. "Countess, you are really too beautiful."

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XI

TWO hours after this scene, the sham Count received from the true one a letter sealed with Octavius' signet — the poor wretch had no other at hand. The opening of a missive sealed with his arms produced a curious impression upon the usurper of Olaf de Labinski's entity, but everything was bound to be singular in the abnormal position in which he found himself.

The letter contained the following lines, written in a constrained hand and in a writing that appeared counterfeit, for Olaf was not used to writing with Octavius' fingers: —

"Were any one else than you to read this letter, it would seem to have been indited in a lunatic asylum, but you will understand me. By an inexplicable concourse of circumstances, which perhaps never occurred since the earth first began to revolve around the sun, I am compelled to do what no man ever did. I have to write to myself, to inscribe on the address a name that belongs to me, a name that you have robbed me of at

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the same time that you robbed me of my body. I do not know what are the foul machinations to which I have fallen a victim, or into what maze of infernal illusions I have stepped; you, no doubt, do know it. If you are not a coward, the muzzle of my pistol or the point of my sword shall ask that secret of you upon the ground where every man, whether a man of honour or a scoundrel, replies to the questions that are put to him. By to-morrow one of us must have ceased to see the light of the sun; this wide world is now too narrow to hold us both. I shall kill my body inhabited by an impostor's spirit, or you shall kill your own, in which my soul fumes at being imprisoned. Do not attempt to make me pass for a madman; I shall have the courage to be sensible, and wherever I may meet you, I shall insult you with the most high-bred politeness, with diplomatic coolness. Mr. Octavius de Saville may take a dislike to the mustaches of Count Olaf Labinski, and every day men tread on each other's toes on leaving the opera; but I trust that my words, though they will be obscure, will be in no wise ambiguous to you, and that my seconds will be able to agree fully with yours on the time, place, and conditions of our duel."

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This letter threw Octavius into the deepest perplexity. He could not refuse the Count's challenge, and yet he felt the strongest repugnance at fighting with himself, for he had preserved a certain tenderness for his former frame. As, however, he might be compelled to assent to a meeting in consequence of some public insult, he decided to accept the challenge. Were he so minded, he could have his adversary put into a strait-jacket, and thus paralyse him, but he revolted at the thought of resorting to such extreme measures. It was true that, carried away by irresistible love, he had done a most reprehensible thing and concealed the lover under the form of the husband in order to triumph over a virtue that resisted every temptation, yet he was devoid neither of the sense of honour nor of courage. Besides, he had yielded only after three years of suffering and struggles, at a moment when his life, consumed by love, was abandoning him. He did not know the Count; he was not his friend; he owed him nothing; and he had profited by the risky means offered him by Dr. Cherbonneau.

But where was he to find seconds? Of course among the Count's friends; but Octavius, having spent

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but a single day in the mansion, had had no opportunity to meet any of them.

On the chimney-piece stood two vases of craquelé céladon, the handles of which were formed of dragons. In the one were rings, scarf-pins, seals, and other jewels; in the other, visiting cards, on which, under coronets of dukes, marquesses, and counts, were engraved by skilful engravers, in round hand, in old English, in script, endless Polish, Russian, Hungarian, German, Italian, or Spanish names, that testified to the travelling habits of the Count, who had friends in every country on the face of the earth.

Octavius took the first that came to his hand: those of Count Zamoieczki and of the Marquis de Sepulveda. He ordered his carriage, drove to the house of each of them, and found them both at home, and not in the least surprised at the visit of him whom they took for Count Olaf Labinski. Absolutely free from the sentimentality of middle-class seconds, they did not inquire whether the quarrel could not be patched up, and asked no questions about its cause, like the well-bred men they were.

On the other hand, the real Count, or, if my reader prefer, the sham Octavius, was in just the same sort

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of difficulty; he remembered, however, Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud, whose invitation to lunch he had declined, and he induced them to act for him on this occasion.

They showed some astonishment on learning that their friend, who had not left his room for nearly a year, and who they well knew was more disposed to peace than war, had a duel on his hands; but when he had told them that it was a fight to the death for a reason that must not be told, they raised no further objections, and proceeded to the Labinski mansion.

The conditions were soon settled, and the choice of weapons was decided by the toss of a gold piece, the two opponents having declared that swords or pistols would be equally acceptable to them. The time was set for six in the morning, and the place the Avenue des Poteaux, near the rustic pavilion with thatched roof and rustic pillars, in a clearing the hard sand soil of which offered the right kind of ground for a meeting of this sort.

By the time everything was settled it was nearly midnight, and Octavius proceeded to Prascovia's room. He found the bolt shot, as on the previous evening,

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and the Countess rallied him in a mocking voice through the door: —

"Come back when you know Polish; I am too patriotic to allow a foreigner to join me in my room."

With the morning came Dr. Cherbonneau, whom Octavius had sent for, armed with a case of instruments and a package of bandages. They got into the carriage together. Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda followed in a coupé.

"So, my dear Octavius," said the doctor, "your adventure is turning to a tragedy. I ought to have left the Count asleep on my divan for a week or so; I have kept people in a trance for a longer time than that; but although a man may have studied wisdom with the Brahmin, the pandits, and the sannyasys of India, he always will leave something forgotten, and his best laid plans prove defective in some particular. But tell me, how did Countess Prascovia receive her Florence lover under his disguise?"

"I believe," answered Octavius, "that she recognised me in spite of my metamorphosis, or else that her guardian angel whispered distrust of me in her ear; I found her as chaste, cold, and pure as the Polar snows. Under the beloved form, her exquisite soul no doubt

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discerned a foreign soul. I was right when I told you that you could not help me; I am more unhappy even than when you first came to see me."

"There can be no limit set to the powers of the soul," said Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau pensively; "especially when it is untouched by earthly thoughts, free from all human filth, and remains such as it came from the Creator's hands in light, in the contemplation of love. Yes, you must be right and she recognised you; her angelic modesty shivered at the glance of desire, and instinctively folded its white wings about itself. I am sorry for you, my dear Octavius, for your sorrow is indeed not to be assuaged, and if we were in the Middle Ages, I should say to you, 'Enter a monastery.'"

"I have often thought of doing so," replied Octavius.

By this time they had reached the place appointed for the meeting. The sham Octavius' coupé was already waiting at the spot.

In the early morning light the woods had a picturesqueness they lose as the day advances and fashion invades them. It was that time in summer when the heat of the sun has not yet told upon the verdure of the foliage; the clumps of trees were bathed in fresh,

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transparent tints, washed by the night dew, and exhaled the scent of new budding vegetation. At this point the trees are particularly handsome, either because the soil is peculiarly favourable to their growth, or because they are the remains of some old plantation. Their sturdy trunks, overlaid with moss or shining satiny bark, plunge their gnarled roots into the ground, stretch out their twisted branches, and would form admirable studies for painters and decorators who go so far afield in search of less beautiful subjects. The birds, that are mute during the day, were chirping gaily in the foliage, and a stray rabbit would bolt across the sanded walk and hide in the long grass, terrified by the sound of the wheels.

But all this poetry of nature in its unconventional aspect did not, as will readily be supposed, trouble the two principals and their seconds.

Count Olaf Labinski felt a shock at the sight of Dr. Cherbonneau, but he quickly recovered himself. The swords were measured; the duellists, after having taken off their coats, were placed in the positions assigned them, and fell on guard, their weapons directed against each other.

"Engage!" cried the seconds.

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In every duel, no matter how bitter the parties may be against each other, there is first a moment of impressive immobility. Each man studies his opponent in silence, and forms his plan, settling on his attack and preparing to return it. Then the swords seek out, excite, feel each other, as it were, without the blades parting. This lasts for a few moments, that to the seconds seem like hours, so full of anxiety are they.

In this case, the conditions of the duel, though apparently, so far at least as the spectators were aware, of an ordinary nature, were so startling to the adversaries themselves that they remained on guard much longer than is customary. In point of fact, each man had his own body before him and had to drive his weapon into a frame that but a day or two before had been his own. The duel was therefore complicated by a sort of unforeseen suicide, and brave though they both were, Octavius and the Count experienced an instinctive feeling of horror at finding themselves sword in hand opposite their own doubles and ready to rush murderously upon themselves.

The seconds, growing impatient, were just about to

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cry, "Do begin!" when the blades at last slid against each other.

Both showed equal skill in parrying the first few attacks. The Count, thanks to his military training, was a skilful swordsman, and had shown himself the equal of several of the most famous teachers; but, though he was still perfect in the theory, he lacked, in order to put it into practice, the muscular arm that had so often cut down Schamyl's Mourids. It was the weak wrist of Octavius that he had now to depend on. On the other hand, Octavius, in the body of the Count, enjoyed a vigour he was unaccustomed to, and though less skilful, always thrust aside from his breast the point that strove to pierce it.

In vain did Olaf do his utmost to reach his adversary; in vain did he risk the most hazardous lunges. Octavius, cooler and firmer, parried every feint. The Count began to lose his temper, and his sword play was becoming reckless and unsteady. Even if he had to remain Octavius de Saville, he meant to destroy that lying body that might deceive Prascovia, a thought that roused his wrath to the highest pitch. So, heedless of the danger to himself, he lunged straight in order to reach, through his own body, his rival's soul and life,

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but Octavius bound his sword with so quick, firm, irresistible a turn, that the weapon, torn from his grasp, flashed through the air and fell to the ground some distance away.

Octavius held Olaf's life in his hands; all he had to do was to lunge and run him through. The Count's face was drawn, not that he feared death, but at the thought that he was about to leave his wife to the thief of his body, and that henceforth the impostor could not be unmasked.

Far from profiting by the advantage he had gained, Octavius threw down his sword, and, signing to the seconds not to interfere, approached the Count, whom, to the latter's stupefaction, he took by the arm and dragged away into a thicket.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the Count. "Why do you not kill me, as you have the right to do? or why do you not allow me to go on fighting you after restoring my sword to me, if you do not wish to slay an unarmed man? You know only too well that the sun must not again project our two shadows upon the sand, and that the earth must receive one or the other of us."

"Listen to me patiently," answered Octavius. "Your

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life's happiness is in my hands. I may, if I choose, keep for ever the body in which I am at this moment dwelling and which is your legitimate property. I am quite willing to acknowledge the fact since there are no witnesses present, and the birds, who will not repeat it, can alone hear us. If we go on with the duel, I shall kill you. Count Olaf Labinski, whom I represent to the best of my ability, is a better swordsman than Octavius de Saville, whose figure you bear, and whom, to my great regret, I shall be forced to slay. Now that death, even though unreal, would plunge my dear mother into the deepest grief."

The Count, perceiving the truth of these remarks, remained silent, apparently acquiescing in them.

"Never," continued Octavius, "will you succeed, unless I myself consent, in regaining your own personality; you can see for yourself what has been the result of your two attempts. If you tried again, you would certainly be taken for a monomaniac; nobody will believe a word you may say, for when you claim to be Count Labinski, everybody laughs in your face, as you very well know. You will be shut up in a private insane asylum, and you will spend the rest of your days in maintaining, while being ducked with cold water, that

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you are the husband of the beautiful Countess Prascovia Labinski. Kind-hearted people will say, as they listen, 'Poor Octavius!' and you will share the fate of Balzac's Colonel Chabert, who tried to make people believe he was not dead."

All this was so absolutely true that the Count, overcome, let fall his head upon his breast.

"As you are Octavius de Saville for the present, you have no doubt looked into his drawers and run through his papers. Consequently you must be aware that for the past three years he has been madly and hopelessly in love with Countess Prascovia Labinski; that he has in vain tried to overcome that love, which will die only when he dies, — that is, supposing it does not last even beyond the grave."

"I do know it," said the Count, biting his lips.

"Well, in order to reach her I made use of a horrible, frightful means, that the maddest passion of love alone could venture to adopt. Dr. Cherbonneau tried in my favour an experiment that would have staggered thaumaturgists in every land and every age. Having plunged us both into a trance, he caused, by his magnetic powers, the transference of our souls. But the miracle was worked in vain! I am going to restore

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your body to you, for Prascovia does not love me. Under the appearance of the husband she recognised the lover's soul, and on the threshold of her room her glance turned as icy as it did in the garden of the Villa Salviati."

Octavius spoke with an accent of such genuine grief that the Count did not hesitate to believe him.

"I am a lover," added Octavius with a smile, "not a thief; and since the only guerdon I cared for on earth cannot be mine, I see no reason why I should keep your titles, your castles, your lands, your wealth, your horses, your arms. Come, take my arm; let us look as if we had made up our quarrel. Let us thank our seconds for their services, take Dr. Cherbonneau with us, and return to the magical laboratory whence we issued transfigured. The old Brahmin is able to undo what he has done."

"Gentlemen," said Octavius, keeping up a little longer his part as Count Olaf Labinski, "my opponent and myself have had a confidential explanation which renders it unnecessary to proceed farther with the duel. There is nothing so efficacious for the clearing up of misunderstandings as the crossing of swords."

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Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda re-entered their carriage, and Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud got into their coupé. Count Olaf Labinski, Octavius de Saville, and Dr. Cherbonneau drove off rapidly to the Rue du Regard.

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XII

ON the way from the Bois de Boulogne to the Rue du Regard, Octavius said to Dr. Cherbonneau: —

"My dear doctor, I am going once more to test your powers. You must retransfer our souls to their former domiciles. You will not find it difficult to do so, and I hope that Count Olaf Labinski will forgive your having compelled him to exchange his palace for a hut and installing for a few hours his brilliant self in my poor frame. Besides, you are powerful enough to fear no man's vengeance."

The physician nodded in acquiescence, and said: —

"The operation will be much easier this time. The imperceptible filaments that bind the soul to the body have been so recently broken in each of you that they have not had time to grow together again; and besides, your wills will not oppose to the magnetiser the instinctive resistance one meets with in the magnetised. I hope, Count, you will forgive an old fellow for not having resisted the pleasure of trying an experiment for

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which it is very difficult to find subjects; the more so that my attempt has merely served to bring out in its full beauty virtue so perfect that it cannot be deceived and that it triumphs where any other would have succumbed. You may take this temporary transformation as a confused dream, and by and by you may not be sorry to have experienced the strange sensation known to very few individuals, of having inhabited two different bodies. Metempsychosis is no new doctrine, but, before their transference to other bodies, souls drink of the cup of forgetfulness, and it is not every one who can, like Pythagoras, remember having taken part in the Trojan war."

"The restoration of my own individuality," politely returned the Count, "is a blessing that makes up for the unpleasantness of having been deprived of it; if I may say so with all due deference to Mr. Octavius de Saville, whom I still am but whom I shall presently not be."

Octavius smiled faintly, with the lips of Count Labinski, on hearing these words that reached him through another man's ears, and the three, whose anomalous situation rendered conversation difficult, relapsed into silence.

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Poor Octavius thought of his vanished hopes, and these thoughts, it must be owned, were not particularly bright. Like all rejected lovers, he still kept asking himself why it was he had failed to make himself beloved, as if love were amenable to reason; as if its only reason were not *because*, — that reply, so logical in spite of its obstinate laconism, which women make to bothersome questions. Nevertheless he acknowledged himself beaten, and the spring of his life, wound up for a moment by Dr. Cherbonneau, had again broken and sounded in his heart like that of a watch that has been dropped to the ground. He wished to save his mother pain, and he was wondering where he could go to die of his strange grief under some scientific appellation. Had he been a painter, a poet or a musician, he would have crystallised his sorrow in masterpieces, and Prascovia, robed in white, and crowned with stars, would have soared over his inspiration like an angel of light; but, as I stated at the beginning of this tale, Octavius, though well educated and well bred, was not one of those great minds that leave their mark upon the world. With his sublime, obscure soul, he could only love and die.

The carriage rattled into the court-yard of the old

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mansion in the Rue du Regard, the pavement of which was overgrown with grass, through which the footsteps of callers had worn a way and which the tall gray walls of the buildings flooded with shadows as cold as those that fall from the arcades of a cloister. Silence and Immobility kept watch and ward upon the threshold like a pair of invisible statues guarding the learned man's meditations.

Octavius and the Count alighted, and the doctor got out with more alertness than one would have expected from a man of his years, and without making use of the arm which the footman offered him with the politeness affected by the servants in great houses towards persons of advanced age or evidently feeble.

As soon as the double doors had closed upon them, Olaf and Octavius felt themselves caught in the heated atmosphere which reminded the physician of that of India, and in which he alone could breathe in comfort, for it almost suffocated people who had not been, like him, roasted for thirty years by the sun of the Tropics. The incarnations of Vishnu still grimaced in their frames, and looked queerer than ever by daylight. Siwa the blue god, grinned on his pedestal, and Durga, biting his indurated lips with his boar's

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tusks, seemed to rattle his chaplet of skulls. The place retained its mysterious, magical appearance.

Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau led his two guests to the room where the first metamorphosis had been effected. He revolved the disk of the electrical machine, moved the iron bars in the Mesmer pail, opened the registers so as to cause the temperature to rise rapidly, read two or three lines from papyri so old that they looked like old bark ready to fall to dust, and, after a few minutes, he said to Octavius and the Count: —

"Gentlemen, I am at your service. Shall we begin?"

While the physician had been preparing himself troublesome thoughts filled the Count's mind.

"Once I am asleep," said he to himself, "what will that monkey-faced old man, who might well be the devil in person, do with my soul? Will he really restore it to my body, or will he carry it off to hell with him? Is this transfer, that is to give me back my own property, but another trap, a Machiavelian contrivance, the object of which I cannot perceive? Even so, my position cannot possibly be worse. Octavius is in possession of my body, and as he very truly said this morning, if I were to claim it under my pres-

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ent guise, I should be confined as a lunatic. If he had wished to rid himself of me finally, he had only to thrust his sword through me. I was disarmed and at his mercy. Human justice had nothing to say in the matter; the duel was perfectly regular and everything was done in accordance with custom. Come! let me fix my thoughts on Prascovia, and do not let me yield to childish terrors. Let me put to the test the only means I have of ever regaining her."

And simultaneously with Octavius, he took hold of the iron rod the physician held out to him.

Stunned by the magnetic fluid with which the metal conductors were charged to their utmost capacity, the two young men speedily sank into a trance so deep that any person not previously informed of the fact, would have supposed them dead. As on the previous occasion, the physician made his passes, spoke the formula, and soon two little, trembling, luminous sparks appeared above Octavius and the Count. The physician first restored to its pristine dwelling-place Count Olaf Labinski's soul, and it flew thither eagerly in response to the magnetiser's gesture.

Meanwhile Octavius' soul was slowly passing away from Olaf's body and, instead of returning to its own,

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rose and rose higher and higher, as if joying in its freedom, and did not appear anxious to re-enter its prison. The doctor was moved with compassion for the fluttering spirit, and asked himself whether it was a kindness or not to draw it back into this vale of tears. While he hesitated, the soul kept on ascending. Remembering what he had to do, Dr. Cherbonneau repeated in the most imperious manner the irresistible monosyllable, and made a gesture tremendous in its authority and power. But the little trembling spark had already passed outside the range of attraction, and flashing through the uppermost pane of the window, it vanished.

The doctor refrained from making any further efforts, well knowing they would be useless, and awakened the Count, who, on seeing in the mirror that he had regained possession of his usual features, uttered a cry of joy, cast a glance at the still motionless body of Octavius, as though to make quite sure that he was at last delivered from that frame, and sprang out, waving an adieu to the physician. A few moments later the dull roll of a carriage passing out under the vaulted entrance was heard, and Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau was left alone face to face with the dead body of Octavius de Saville.

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"By the trunk of Ganesa!" exclaimed the pupil of the Elephanta Brahmin, when the Count had gone out; "this is a nice mess! I opened the cage door, the bird has flown away, and it is already so far from this mundane sphere that even Brahma-Loghum, the sannyasi, could not recall it, and I am left with a dead body on my hands. Of course, I could easily dissolve it in a corrosive bath of such strength that not a trace of it could be found, or turn it in the course of a few hours into a Pharaonic mummy like those enclosed in the cases covered over with hieroglyphs, but an inquiry would certainly be set on foot; my place would be searched, my boxes opened, and I should be asked all manner of unpleasant questions."

At this moment a brilliant idea occurred to the physician. He seized a pen and rapidly wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper which he then placed in the drawer of his desk. The paper contained the following words: —

"Having neither parents nor relatives, I bequeath all my property to Mr. Octavius de Saville, for whom I entertain particular affection, on the condition that he shall pay to the Brahmin Hospital in Ceylon, a sum of one hundred thousand francs, for the benefit of old,

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worn-out, or sick animals; that he shall pay to my Hindoo servant and to my English servant an annuity of twelve hundred francs apiece, and that he shall hand over to the Mazarin Library my manuscript copy of the laws of Manou."

This bequest made by the living to the dead is assuredly one of the strangest incidents in this most unlikely, yet perfectly true tale; but the reason for it will presently become apparent.

The physician touched the body of Octavius de Saville, which still retained the warmth of life; looked in the mirror at his own tanned, wrinkled face, rough as shagreen, with a singularly disdainful air, and making a gesture like a man who throws off an old coat to put on a new one brought him by the tailor, he spoke the formula taught him by Brahma-Loghum, the sannyasi.

As if struck by a thunderbolt, the body of Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau fell to the ground, while that of Octavius de Saville sprang up full of life, strong and alert.

Octavius-Cherbonneau remained for a few moments standing by the lean, bony, livid form that, no longer sustained by the powerful soul which had vivified it a

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second before, exhibited almost at once signs of extreme old age, and rapidly assumed a cadaverous appearance.

"Fare thee well, poor human rag, wretched vestment out at elbows, worn on every seam, which for seventy years I have dragged about the four corners of the world! Thou hast served me faithfully, and it is not without a pang that I leave thee, for one gets used to the companionship of life. But in this youthful frame, which my knowledge will enable me to speedily endow with vigorous health, I shall be able to study, to work, to read yet a few more words of the great Book, without death closing it at the most interesting part and saying: 'Enough!'"

Having thus spoken his own funeral discourse, Octavius-Cherbonneau went forth peacefully to take possession of his new existence.

Count Olaf Labinski had hurried back to his mansion and asked if the Countess could see him. He found her in the conservatory, seated on a mossy bank, amid a veritable virgin forest of exotic and tropical plants, while through the half-opened sashes blew in a bright, soft air. She was reading Novalis, one of the most subtle, most rarefied, most immaterial writers

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which German spiritualism has produced. The Countess did not like books that depicted life in strong and realistic colours, and life itself struck her, thanks to her living so much in a world of refinement, poetry, and love, as somewhat coarse.

She threw down her book and slowly raised her eyes to those of the Count. She dreaded seeing again in her husband's dark orbs the burning, stormy glance, laden with mysterious thoughts, that had so deeply troubled her and which seemed to her — absurd as the thought was — the glance of another man.

But in Olaf's eyes shone joy serene, burned the steady flame of chaste, pure love; the foreign soul that had changed the expression of his features, had flown for ever. Prascovia at once recognised her beloved husband's real self, and her cheeks flushed with happiness. Although she was ignorant of the transformations worked by Dr. Cherbonneau, her sensitive nature had unconsciously perceived every change.

"What are you reading, my dear Prascovia?" said Olaf, as he picked up from the mossy bank the book, bound in blue morocco. "Ah! the story of Heinrich

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von Ofterdingen. Why, this is the very book I once rode full speed to Mohilev to get for you, because you had said you would like to have it. By midnight it was on your table, by the side of your lamp. Ralph, it is true, paid for it with his wind."

"And I remember saying that never again should I express any wish in your presence. You are like that grandee of Spain who begged his mistress not to look at the stars, for he could not get them for her."

"If *you* were to look at one," replied the Count, "I should try to scale the heavens and to go and ask God for it."

While listening to her husband, the Countess was smoothing a rebellious lock of hair in her bandeau, that flashed like a flame in a sunbeam. As she did so, her sleeve slipped down, baring her beautiful arm, encircled by the turquoise-studded bracelet she wore on the day she made her appearance at the Cascine, a day that had proved fatal to Octavius.

"How that poor little lizard, which I killed with a blow of my light cane, frightened you that day when, at my request, you came down to the garden for the first time. I had it copied in gold and adorned with a

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few stones, but even in the form of a jewel it still terrified you, and it was some time before you could make up your mind to wear it."

"Oh! I am quite used to it now, and it is my favourite ornament, for it recalls a very sweet remembrance."

"Yes," went on the Count; "it was on that day that we agreed that the next morning I should ask your aunt for your hand."

The Countess, finding again the glance and the accent of the real Olaf, and, besides, reassured by these secret remembrances, smiled upon him, took his arm and walked about the conservatory with him, gathering, as she went, with the hand that was free, a flower here and there and biting the petals with her blooming lips, like that Venus whom Schiavone has represented feeding upon roses.

"Since your memory is so good to-day," said she, casting away the flower she was biting with her pearly teeth, "I suppose you have regained the command of your mother tongue — which you had forgotten yesterday?"

"Oh!" replied the Count in Polish, "that is the tongue in which my soul shall speak to you in Heaven

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to tell you I love you, if souls in Heaven speak with human tongues."

Prascovia, as she walked, let her head rest softly on Olaf's shoulder.

"Dear heart," she whispered, "now you are such as I love you. Yesterday, you frightened me, and I fled from you as from a stranger."

The next day, Octavius de Saville, in whose body dwelt the soul of the old physician, received a black-bordered letter, inviting him to attend the funeral of Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau. The doctor, in his new frame, followed his former body to the cemetery, saw himself interred, listened with a well assumed air of reverence to the address delivered at the grave, and in which the irreparable loss sustained by science was deplored, and then he returned to the Rue Saint-Lazare, to await the reading of the will he had made in his own favour.

On the same day the following paragraph appeared in the evening papers: —

"Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, well known by his long residence in India, his philological attainments, and the marvellous cures he effected, was found dead, yesterday, in his study. A minute examination of the body

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failed to reveal any traces of crime. Death was probably caused by excessive intellectual fatigue or may have been the result of some dangerous experiment. It is said that an olograph will, found among the doctor's papers, bequeaths to the Mazarin Library a number of exceedingly valuable manuscripts, and that a young gentleman of distinguished family, Mr. O. de S., is appointed residuary legatee."

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Fettatura

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JETTATURA

I

THE "Leopold," a splendid Tuscan steamer plying between Marseilles and Naples, had just doubled Procida Point. The passengers, cured of their sea-sickness by the sight of land, most efficacious of all remedies, were all out on deck. On the part reserved for the first-class passengers, stood a number of Englishmen endeavouring to get away as far as possible from each other and to trace around themselves a circle none might venture to enter. Their splenetic faces were carefully shaven, their cravats had not a wrinkle, their shirt collars, white and stiff, looked like triangles of Bristol board, their hands were protected by brand-new Suède gloves, and their new boots shone with Lord Elliot's blacking. They looked as if they had just emerged from one of the compartments of their dressing-cases, for in their correct get-up there were visible none of the little disorders of dress which are the usual consequences of travel.

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There were noblemen, members of Parliament, City merchants, tailors from Regent Street, and cutlers from Sheffield, all proper, grave, motionless, and bored. Nor were ladies wanting, for Englishwomen are not sedentary like the women of other lands, and the smallest pretext suffices to justify their leaving their island. By the side of the great ladies and of the wives of commoners, somewhat ripe beauties, with blotchy faces, bloomed, their faces half concealed by their blue veils, maidens with complexions of milk and roses, with shimmering golden tresses, and long white teeth, recalling the favourite types of "Keepsakes," and proving that English engravings are not so untrue to life as is often said. These lovely creatures repeated, each in turn, with the most delightful British accent, the obligatory "*Vedi Napoli e poi mori;*" perused their Murray or wrote down their impressions of travel upon their note-books, without paying the least attention to the glances of a number of would-be Don Juans from Paris who roamed about in their vicinity, while the angry mammas grumbled about French impropriety.

On the edge of the aristocratic quarter-deck, strolled, while smoking their cigars, three or four young fellows whose straw or felt hats, sack-coats with huge horn

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buttons, and duck trousers, made it easy to recognise as artists, a fact confirmed by their mustaches *à la* Van Dyck, their hair curled *à la* Rubens, or cropped short *à la* Paolo Veronese. Inspired by very different motives they also were trying, like the dandies, to catch a glimpse of the beauties whom their lack of wealth forbade their approaching more closely, and these efforts somewhat interfered with their enjoyment of the magnificent panorama outspread before them.

In the bows of the vessel, leaning against the bulwarks or seated on coils of rope, were grouped the third-class passengers, engaged in consuming the provisions uneaten on account of the sea-sickness, and casting not one glance upon the finest view in the world, for the feeling of nature is the privilege of cultivated minds which are not absorbed wholly by the material needs of life.

The weather was fine; the blue waves rolled broadly on with scarce power enough to efface the ship's wake. The smoke from the funnel, forming clouds in the glorious heavens, blew away softly in cottony flakes, and the paddle-wheels, revolving in an iridescent diamond spray, churned the water with joyous activity as if aware of the proximity of the harbour.

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Already the purple lines of hills that, from Posilipo to Vesuvius, encircle the wondrous gulf at the upper end of which Naples lies like a sea-nymph resting and drying herself after her bath, were becoming more distinct and stood out more plainly against the brilliant azure of the heavens. Already a few white spots, showing on the darker background of the land, indicated the presence of towns scattered along the countryside. The sails of the homeward-bound fishing-boats slipped along the smooth blue waters like swans' feathers blown by the breeze, and spoke of human activity upon the majestic solitude of the sea.

Very soon the Castle of Saint-Elmo and the Convent di San Martino came out distinctly on the crest of the mountain on which stands Naples, showing above the domes of the churches, the terraces of the hotels, the fronts of the palaces, and the verdure of the gardens, that were yet but faintly visible through a luminous haze. Then the Castello dell' Ovo, squatting on its foam-flecked reef, seemed to approach the steamer, and the pier with its lighthouse drew near like an arm holding a torch.

At the end of the bay, Vesuvius, now nearer, changed its blue tints, due to distance, for more vigorous and

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solid tones; its sides were seen to be furrowed with gullies and streams of lava grown cold, and from its truncated cone, as from the holes of a perfume-burner, plainly issued little jets of white smoke that wavered in the wind.

Chiatamone, Pizzo Falcone, the hotel-bordered quay of Santa Lucia, the Palazzo Nuovo, flanked with its balconied towers, the Arsenal, and ships of all nations, mingling their masts and spars like the trees of a leafless wood, were plainly to be seen, when there emerged from a cabin a passenger who had not shown up once during the whole trip, either because sea-sickness had kept him in confinement, or because his reserve prevented his mingling with his fellow-travellers, or again because the prospect, new to most of them, had long been a familiar sight to him and had ceased to excite his interest.

He was a young fellow of twenty-six to twenty-eight years. At least such was the age one felt tempted to give him at the first glance, though when he was examined attentively he seemed to be either younger or older than that, so curiously mingled were weariness and youthfulness upon his enigmatical countenance. His hair, of that dark fairness called auburn

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by the English, shone in the sunlight with coppery, metallic sheen, and in the shade seemed almost black. His profile was clear cut, his brow would have called forth the admiration of a phrenologist, thanks to its protuberances, his nose was nobly aquiline, his lips well formed, and his chin had that powerful roundness that recalls the medals of antiquity. Yet, these various features, individually handsome, did not form an agreeable whole. They lacked the mysterious harmony that softens contours and makes them melt one into another. There is a legend of an Italian painter who, seeking to represent the rebellious archangel, composed a face of dissimilar beauties and thus attained an effect of terror far beyond what is possible by the use of horns, arched eyebrows, and unholy grin. The stranger's face produced a similar impression. His eyes, in particular, were extraordinary. The black lashes that edged them contrasted with the pale gray colour of the pupils and the auburn shade of the hair; the thinness of the nose caused them to look nearer each other than allowed by the rules of drawing, and as for their expression it was quite undefinable. When the young man's gaze did not consciously rest upon anything, it was moist with vague melancholy and soft

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tenderness, but if he looked at any one or anything, his brows bent, and formed a perpendicular wrinkle on his forehead; the pupils lost their gray colour and turned green, spotted with black spots and striated with yellow lines; his glance then flashed sharply, almost painfully, after which he would resume his former placidity, and from a Mephistophelian individual turn into a young man of the world — a member of the Jockey Club, if you like — on his way to spend the season in Naples, and glad to step on a lava floor less mobile than the "Leopold's" deck.

His dress was elegant and did not draw the eye by any striking details. He wore a dark blue frock coat, a black cravat with polka dots, which was tied in a way that avoided both carelessness and over carefulness; a waistcoat of the same pattern as the tie, a pair of light gray trousers, and neat boots. His gold watch chain was of the plainest pattern, and the cord of his eye-glasses was of silk, tressed flat. In his well-gloved hand he carried a slender cane, made of a twisted vine-stem, mounted in silver.

He took a few steps along the deck, his glance wandering idly over the shore, now drawing closer, and on which one could see the carriages driving along,

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the people crowding and the collecting of those groups of idlers to whom the arrival of a stage-coach or a steamer is an ever interesting and ever novel sight, even though they have gazed upon it a thousand times.

Already a flotilla of boats and other craft was starting for the quay, with the intention of boarding the "Leopold." They bore waiters, guides, facchini and other assorted samples of the rabble which is accustomed to look on strangers as its natural prey. The various craft were rowing hard in order to be the first to reach the ship, and, as usual, the crews were exchanging insults in a loud tone of voice fit to terrify people unused to the manners and customs of the lower classes in Naples.

The auburn haired young man had, in order to grasp more readily the details of the prospect unrolled before him, put on his eye-glasses, but his attention, distracted from the sublime prospect of the bay by the concert of yells that rose from the flotilla, was drawn to the boats. No doubt he was annoyed at the noise, for his brows bent, the wrinkle on his brow became marked, and his gray eyes turned yellowish.

An unexpected billow, running in from sea, with a fringe of foam on its crest, passed under the steamer

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which it raised and let fall again heavily, broke on the quay in blinding spray, wetted the promenaders surprised by the suddenness of the douche, and with its backwash dashed the boats together so roughly that a number of facchini fell overboard. The accident had no serious consequences, for the rascals swam like fishes or marine deities, and reappeared a few seconds later, with the salt water running out of their mouths and their ears, their hair plastered against their temples, and assuredly as much astonished at the unexpected dive as was Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, when Minerva, under the guise of the sage Mentor, threw him into the sea from the top of a rock in order to withdraw him from the love of Eucharis.

At a respectful distance behind the strange traveller, there stood by a pile of trunks a small groom, a sort of old man of fifteen, a liveried gnome, who looked like one of the dwarfs whom the Chinese patiently bring up in porcelain jars to prevent their growing. His flat face, on which the nose scarcely showed, seemed to have been compressed in earliest childhood, and his protruding eyes had the sweetness of look which certain naturalists attribute to the toad's eye. Neither his chest nor his back was deformed, and

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though one would in vain have looked for a hump on him, he gave the impression of being a hunchback. In a word, he was a very proper groom, who might have ridden at Ascot or Chantilly without first going into training; his queer looks would have determined any gentleman-rider to engage him on the spot. He was repulsive, but irreproachable in his own way, like his master.

The passengers landed, and, with their luggage, fell a prey to the porters after the latter had exchanged insults that were more than Homeric, and proceeded to the various hotels with which Naples is abundantly provided.

The traveller with the eye-glasses and his groom went to the Hôtel de Rome, followed by a numerous company of robust facchini who pretended to groan and sweat under the burden of a hat-box or a small parcel, guilelessly expecting a heavy tip, while four or five of their comrades, who exhibited muscles as powerful as those of the "Hercules" so much admired in the Studj, pushed a handcart on which had been placed two trunks of moderate size and equally moderate weight.

When the hotel was reached and the *padron di casa*

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had shown the newcomer to his apartment, the porters, although they had received about three times their legal fare, indulged in the most frantic gesticulations and in speeches in which supplications and threats were mingled in the most comical fashion, all shouting at one and the same time with terrific volubility, claiming additional pay and swearing by all that was holy that they had not been sufficiently rewarded for their exertions. Paddy, who had to face them alone — for his master, unheeding the noise, had already gone upstairs — looked like a monkey surrounded by a pack of hounds. In order to still the tumult, he attempted a harangue in his mother tongue, that is, in English, but his speech proved unacceptable. Then, closing his fists and placing his arms breast high, he assumed, to the great hilarity of the facchini, a very correct boxing attitude, and with a blow straight from the shoulder, worthy of Adams or Tom Cribb, he landed on the breadbasket of the biggest fellow in the crowd, and sent him flying heels over head on the lava pavement.

This exploit put the rabble to flight; the hulking fellow picked himself up with difficulty, feeling very sore, and, without seeking to have his revenge on Paddy, went off with endless contortions, rubbing with

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his hand the blue-black mark that was already showing on his skin, and convinced that a devil must be hidden under the jacket of the monkey-like groom, who looked as if he were fit to ride nothing bigger than a dog and as if a breath of wind would blow him away.

The stranger, having summoned the *padron di casa*, asked him if any letters had come for Mr. Paul d'Aspremont. The hotel-keeper replied that a letter so addressed had been lying for a week in the letter-rack, and he hastened to fetch the epistle. The letter, enclosed in a thick envelope of blue cream laid paper, and sealed with aventurine sealing-wax, was addressed in a sloping, angular hand with cursive strokes, denoting a high aristocratic education, and common, too uniformly perhaps, to English young ladies of good family.

The contents of the note, which Mr. d'Aspremont opened with an eagerness due apparently to something more than mere curiosity, were as follows:—

"Dear Mr. Paul,—We reached Naples two months ago, travelling by short stages. Uncle complained bitterly of the heat, the mosquitoes, the wine, the butter, the beds. He swore he must have been crazy to leave

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his comfortable home near London, to travel on dusty roads lined with wretched inns, in which no decent English dog would consent to pass the night; but, for all his grumbling, he accompanied me and I could have taken him to the world's end. He is none the worse for his trip, and I am a great deal better. We have settled down on the sea-shore, in a whitewashed house hidden in a sort of virgin forest of orange, lime, myrtle, and rose laurel trees, and other exotic plants. From our terrace we have a wonderful view, and every afternoon you will find there a cup of tea or a glass of lemonade, whichever you may prefer. Uncle, whom you have fascinated, I know not how, will be delighted to see you again; and need I add that I shall not be sorry to do so either, although you did cut my fingers with your ring when you bade us good-bye on the pier at Folkstone?

"ALICIA W."

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II

PAUL D'ASPREMONT, after he had dined in his room, called for a carriage. There are always plenty of them round the large hotels on the look-out for travellers, so that his wish was at once gratified. By the side of Neapolitan cab horses, Rosinante itself would seem in excellent condition; their skinny heads, their ribs showing like the hoops of a barrel, their protruding backbones, always raw, seem to implore as a kindness the knacker's knife, for the careless Southerner deems it a piece of needless attention to feed animals. The harness, usually broken, is mended with bits of cord, and when the coachman has gathered up his reins and calls on his horses to start, one feels sure that the horses will vanish into thin air and the vehicle disappear in smoke, after the manner of Cinderella's carriage when she returned from the ball after midnight, contrary to the fairy's orders. But it is not so; the poor brutes stiffen their limbs, and after a few struggles, start on a gallop which they keep up steadily. The coachman inspires them with his

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own ardour, and the lash of his whip brings out the last spark of life concealed within their skeleton frames. They prance, throw their heads up and down, try to look spirited, open their eyes and their nostrils, and go at a pace that the fastest English trotters could not equal. To what this phenomenon is due, and what is the mysterious power that enables dead animals to gallop at full speed, I cannot explain, but the fact is patent that this miracle is of daily occurrence in Naples and that no one is in the least surprised at it.

Mr. Paul d'Aspremont's carriage was flying through the dense crowd, shaving the citron-wreathed acquajoli shops, the open-air stalls of vendors of stews and macaroni, the fishmongers' stalls, and the heaps of water-melons ranged on the highway like piles of cannonballs in an artillery park. Scarcely did the lazzaroni, lying along the walls wrapped up in their mantles, deign to draw their legs out of the way of the equipages. From time to time a corricolo, with its great scarlet wheels, dashed past bearing a crowd of monks, nurses, facchini, and ragamuffins, and scraping the wheels of d'Aspremont's carriage in the midst of a cloud of dust and noise. Corricoli are now proscribed, and it is forbidden to build any new ones, but it is permitted to put

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a new body on an old pair of wheels, or to fit new wheels to an old body, an ingenious method which will enable these quaint vehicles to last a long time yet, to the great delight of amateurs of local colour.

Our traveller, however, paid but scant attention to the animated and picturesque sights that would certainly have attracted any tourist who had not found awaiting him at the Hôtel de Rome a note addressed to him and signed "Alicia W." He looked with inattentive gaze at the blue, limpid sea, on which could be made out, in a brilliant light, and coloured by distance with amethyst and sapphire tints, the lovely isles scattered in fan shape at the entrance of the bay: Capri, Ischia, Nisida, Procida, the harmonious names of which resound like Greek dactyls. But his soul was not there; it was flying away in the direction of Sorrento, towards the little white house nestling in the greenery, and spoken of by Alicia in her note.

At this moment d'Aspremont's face had not the indefinably unpleasant expression it bore when some inward joy did not harmonise its dissonant perfections. It was positively handsome and sympathetic, as the Italians are fond of saying. The corners of his mouth were not drawn down disdainfully, and his quiet eyes

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were filled with tender light. It was easy to understand, on seeing him thus, the feelings for him apparently indicated by the half tender, half mocking words on the cream laid paper. His individuality, backed up by his high breeding, must have proved attractive to a young girl brought up with much freedom in the English fashion by an old and very indulgent uncle.

Thanks to the pace at which the coachman drove his horses, Chiaja and La Marinella were soon left behind, and the carriage drove through the open country on a road now replaced by a railway line. Black dust, like triturated coal, imparts a Plutonian aspect to the whole of this shore, over which shines a dazzling sky and which is laved by a sea of the loveliest azure. It is the soot of Vesuvius, sifted by the wind, that dusts the beach and makes the houses of Portici and Torre del Greco look like Birmingham factories. But d'Aspremont did not concern himself with the contrast between the ebon earth and the sapphire heavens; he was in too great a hurry to reach his destination. The finest roads are long when a Miss Alicia is waiting for one at the end of them, and when it is six months since one parted from her on the pier at Folkestone.

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The sky and the sea of Naples fail to work their spell under these circumstances.

The carriage left the highway, turned down a cross-road, and drew up in front of a gate formed of two whitewashed brick pillars, surmounted with vases in terra cotta, in which bloomed aloes with leaves like tin and sharp as daggers. It was closed by an open-work green-painted swinging gate, and the wall was replaced by a hedge of cacti, the angular stems of which had inextricably interlaced their thorny fronds. Above the hedge, three or four huge fig-trees spread out their broad metallic leaves in compact masses, growing vigorously like African vegetation. A great umbrella pine waved its crown of leaves, and one could scarcely make out, through the luxuriant growth, the white façade of the house gleaming in spots behind the thick curtain of foliage.

A dark-complexioned servant, with curling hair so thick that it would have broken a comb, hastened up at the sound of the wheels, opened the gate, and, walking in front of Mr. d'Aspremont down a rose laurel walk, the blooms of which caressed his cheeks, led him to the terrace where Miss Alicia was having tea with her uncle.

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Yielding to a very justifiable caprice in a young lady, tired of comfort and elegance, and mayhap also to tease her uncle, whose commonplace tastes she made fun of, Miss Alicia had chosen, in preference to a more civilised dwelling, this villa, the owners of which were travelling, and which had remained uninhabited for a number of years. She found in this abandoned garden, that had almost returned to a state of nature, a wild poetry that pleased her; in the quickening Neapolitan climate everything had grown with prodigious activity. Orange trees and myrtles, pomegranates and lime trees had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and not having the fear of the gardener's pruning-knife before their eyes, had clasped hands across the walk from one end to the other, or penetrated familiarly into the rooms wherever there was a broken pane. The place did not have the sad look of a deserted Northern abode, but was marked by the mad joy and happy carelessness of Southern nature left to itself. In the owner's absence, the exuberant vegetation had indulged in a debauch of leaves, flowers, fruits, and scents, and re-conquered the ground man had deprived it of.

When the Commodore, for so Alicia familiarly called her uncle, saw the impenetrable thicket, through which

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a machete was needed to cut a way, he broke out into the liveliest remonstrances and swore his niece was crazy. But Alicia gravely promised to have cut from the entrance-door to the drawing-room and from the drawing-room to the terrace a passage wide enough for the bringing in of a butt of Malmsey wine, this being the only concession she would grant to her uncle's positivism. The Commodore had to give in, for he could never resist his niece, and at this very time he was on the terrace, seated opposite to her, sipping a big glass of rum, which he called tea.

The terrace, which had mainly attracted the young lady, was, in point of fact, very picturesque and merits a detailed description, for Paul d'Aspremont will often return to it, and one ought to paint the setting of the scenes one describes.

The terrace, the precipitous walls of which overhung a hollow road, was reached by steps formed of broad disjointed stones, between the interstices of which grew luxuriantly vigorous wild plants. Four broken pillars, brought from some antique ruin, their lost capitals replaced by square stones, supported a trellis of poles intertwined and covered with vines. From the parapet fell in sheets and wreaths wall plants and

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wild vines. At the foot of the walls Indian figs, aloes, and arbutus grew in delightful disorder, while beyond a wood topped by a palm tree and three Italian pines, the view extended over rolling ground on which were scattered white villas, embraced the violet outlines of Vesuvius, or was prolonged over the blue distance of the sea.

When Paul d'Aspremont appeared at the top of the steps, Alicia rose with an exclamation of pleasure, and came forward to meet him. Paul shook hands with her in English fashion, but the young lady raised her prisoned hand to the lips of her friend with a motion full of youthful grace and ingenuous coquetry.

The Commodore tried to raise himself on his gouty legs, and managed to do so after a few grimaces due to pain, which contrasted comically with the look of delight that illumined his broad face. He approached, alertly enough for him, the two young people, and grasped Paul's hand in a way to crush his fingers against each other, which is the highest outward mark of good British cordiality.

Miss Alicia Ward belonged to that class of English brunettes who realise an ideal the very conditions of which seem to be irreconcilable; that is, a skin so

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dazzlingly fair as to make milk, snow, lilies, alabaster, virgin wax, and whatever poets use by way of comparisons of whiteness, look almost yellow by the side of it, cherry lips, and hair as black as the darkness of night on a raven's wing. The effect of this contrast is irresistible, and results in a singular loveliness which has no equivalent. It may be that some Circassians, brought up in the Seraglio from childhood possess the same wonderful complexion, but on this point I have no information to go by save the exaggerations of Oriental poetry and the water-colour paintings by Lewis that represent the harems of Cairo. Alicia was assuredly the most perfect type of this style of beauty.

The long oval of her face, her incomparably pure complexion, her well-shaped, delicate, transparent nose, her dark blue eyes fringed with long lashes that fluttered on her rosy cheeks like black butterflies when she lowered her eyelids, her lips coloured with dazzling crimson, her hair falling in long, shimmering ringlets like satin ribbons on either side of her face and of her swan-like neck, testified in favour of the romantic female faces by Maclise which, at the Universal Exhibition, looked like delightful impostures.

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She wore a flounced grenadine dress, the flounces themselves festooned and embroidered with red sprigs that harmonised wonderfully well with the small grained strings of coral that formed her head-dress, her necklace, and her bracelets. Five pendants, hung from a facetted coral pearl, quivered in each of her small, delicately convoluted ears. If the reader feels like blaming this wealth of coral, let him remember that he is in Naples, where the fishermen come up out of the sea on purpose to present you with these branches that the air turns red.

I owe that reader of mine, were it but by way of contrast to the portrait of Alicia which I have just drawn, at the very least a Hogarthian caricature of her uncle.

The Commodore, who was some sixty years old, was noticeable for his uniformly crimson face, on which stood out his white eyebrows and mutton-chop whiskers, so that he looked like an old redskin tattooed with chalk. Sunstrokes, unavoidable on a trip to Italy, had added a few more layers to that ardent colouring. He was dressed from head to foot, jacket, waistcoat, trousers and gaiters, in a reddish-gray vicuna, which no doubt his tailor had assured him was the most fashionable shade and that most worn, wherein perchance

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he lied not. Yet, in spite of his brilliant complexion and his eccentric dress, the Commodore looked by no means vulgar. His thorough cleanliness, his irreproachable neatness and his fine manner pointed him out as a perfect gentleman, even though he had more than one external resemblance to the Englishmen in farces which Hoffmann and Levassor are fond of parodying. As for his character, he adored his niece and drank much port wine and Jamaica rum to keep up the humid root, after the manner of Corporal Trim.

"See how well I am now, and how lovely! Look at my colour; I am not yet up to uncle, and I hope I shall never be. But I have roses here, real roses," said Alicia, as she drew across her cheek a slender finger tipped with a nail polished as agate. "I have grown stouter, too, and those horrid salt-cellars that caused me so much trouble when I went to balls have vanished. Now, must not a woman be a coquette to part with her lover for three months, so that at the end of the time he may find her blooming and splendid!"

As she spoke this tirade in the playful and sparkling tone familiar to her, Alicia stood before Paul as if to challenge him to examine her.

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"She is as robust and full of health now," added the Commodore, "as those Procida girls who carry amphoræ on their heads, is she not?"

"Unquestionably, Commodore," answered Paul; "it was impossible for Alicia to be more lovely, but she is plainly in better health than when, through coquetry, as she claims, she compelled me to endure a painful separation."

As he said this, his glance rested with strange fixity upon the young girl who stood before him. Suddenly the lovely rosy flush she had boasted of having acquired faded from Alicia's cheeks as the flush of evening fades from the snowy mountain slopes when the sun sinks in the west. Trembling all over, she put her hand to her heart, and her lovely lips paled and were contracted with pain.

Paul, much alarmed, rose, as did the Commodore. Alicia's bright colour had returned, though her smile still cost her an effort.

"I promised you a cup of tea or a sherbet, and, although I am English, I advise you to have the sherbet. Snow is better than hot water in this country, so near to Africa that the sirocco comes straight from it."

The three sat down round the stone table, under the

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vine-leaf bower. The sun had sunk into the sea, and the azure day, called night in Naples, followed the golden day. The moon scattered silvery spots upon the terrace through the interstices of the foliage; the sea rippled with kissing sound upon the beach, and from a distance came the sound of the tambourines that accompanied the tarantella.

By and by Paul had to take his leave. Vicè, the dark-complexioned, wavy-haired maid, came with a lantern to show Paul his way through the mazes of the garden. While serving the sherbet and snow water, she had fized upon the new-comer a glance in which curiosity was mingled with fear. Doubtless the result of this examination had been unfavourable to Paul, for Vicè's brow, already as brown as a cigar, had darkened still more, and as she accompanied the stranger, she directed towards him, but so that he should not notice it, her first and fourth fingers, while the other two, folded back under the palm, met the thumb as if to form some cabalistic sign.

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III

ALICIA'S friend returned to the Hôtel de Rome by the same road he had come. The night was incomparably beautiful; the bright, splendid moon cast upon the diaphanous blue waters a long trail of silvery spangles, the perpetual motion of which, due to the lipping of the wavelets, increased their brilliancy. In the offing, the fishing boats, each bearing in the bows an iron cradle filled with lighted tow, studded the sea with red stars and left ruddy wakes behind them. The smoke from Vesuvius, white by day, had changed into a pillar of fire and also cast its reflection upon the bay, that, at this moment, had that appearance which strikes Northern eyes as improbable, and which it has in those Italian water-colours, in black frames, so widespread a few years ago, and which were more accurate than one would have supposed, judging by their crude exaggeration.

A few noctambulistic lazzaroni still mooned about the beach, unconsciously moved by the wondrous prospect,

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and looked out into the blue distance with their great black eyes. Others, seated on the rail of some boat hauled up on the shore, were singing the aria from "Lucia" or the then popular romance, "*Ti voglio ben' assai*," in a voice that many a highly paid tenor would have envied. Naples sits up late, like all Southern cities, yet the lights in the windows were going out one by one, and only the lottery offices, with their coloured paper decorations, their favourite numbers, and their bright lights, remained open, ready to receive the money of capricious gamblers who, as they wended homeward, might be seized with the fancy of wagering a few carlini or a few ducats upon some number they had dreamed of.

Paul turned in, drew the gauze mosquito-netting about his bed, and speedily fell asleep. As happens to travellers after a sea trip, his couch, though motionless, seemed to him to pitch, scend, and roll, just as if the Hôtel de Rome had been the "Leopold." This feeling caused him to dream that he was still at sea, and that on the pier he saw Alicia, looking very pale by the side of her red-faced uncle, signing to him not to land. The face of the young girl expressed deep grief, and she seemed, as she motioned him back, to

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be obeying much against her will some imperious fatality.

The dream, to which recent images lent extraordinary reality, so troubled the sleeper that he awoke, and he was glad to find himself in his room, in which quivered the opaline reflections of a night-light that illumined a small porcelain tube round which the mosquitoes buzzed and swarmed. In order not again to have such a painful dream, Paul struggled against sleep and began to think of the beginning of his acquaintance with Alicia, going over, one after another, the innocently charming scenes of first love.

He saw again the red brick house in Richmond, covered with roses and honeysuckle, where dwelt Alicia and her uncle, and to which he had gone, on his first visit to England, with one of those letters of introduction the sole result of which is usually an invitation to dinner. He recalled the white Indian muslin dress, with a single ribbon for sole ornament, which Alicia, who had just left boarding-school, wore on that day, and the spray of jasmine which twined in the wealth of her hair like a floweret from Ophelia's wreath borne away by the stream, her velvet blue eyes and her half opened mouth which allowed a

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glimpse of her pearly teeth, her slender neck that turned like that of a bird whose attention is awakened, and her sudden blush when the glance of the young French gentleman met hers.

The dark wainscotted sitting-room, hung with green cloth, and adorned with fox-hunting scenes and steeple-chasing incidents, coloured in the crude English way, came up in his mind as in a camera obscura. There was the piano with its row of keys like the set of teeth of some old dowager. Under the mantelpiece, round which grew a spray of ivy, shone the black-leaded grate; he could see the oaken arm-chairs, covered with morocco, the carpet with its rose pattern, and Alicia, trembling like a leaf, singing in the most adorably out-of-tune voice, the romance from "Anna Bolena," "*deh, non voler costringere*," while he, not less moved than she, accompanied her, entirely out of time, and the Commodore, dozing in slow digestion, and redder than ever, let slip to the ground a bulky "Times" and its "Supplement."

Then the scene changed. Paul, who had been admitted to the intimacy of the family, was invited by the Commodore to spend a few days in their Lincolnshire home. An old feudal castle, with crenelated

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towers and Gothic windows, half-covered with ivy, but arranged internally with all modern comforts, rose at the end of a lawn, the turf of which, carefully watered and rolled, was smooth as velvet. Round the sward ran a sanded walk, which served Alicia for a riding-ground, and on which she cantered on one of the wild-maned Scottish ponies, which Sir Edward Landseer loves to paint, and to which he gives an almost human glance. Paul, mounted on a bright bay lent him by the Commodore, accompanied her on her circular ride; for the physician, who found her lungs rather weak, had ordered her to take exercise.

Or again a light boat glided over the pond, brushing aside the waterlilies and sending the kingfishers scurrying away to the refuge of the silvery willows. Alicia rowed and Paul held the yoke-lines. How lovely she looked in the golden halo formed round her head by the sunbeams that shone through her straw hat! She pulled her oars well back, pressing the tip of her gray shoe against the thwart. Alicia's foot was not short and round like a smoothing iron, the Andalusian shape so much admired in Spain; she had a neatly turned ankle, a high instep, and if the sole of her shoe was a shade long, it was not two inches wide.

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The Commodore remained on shore, — not that his rank kept him there, but his weight, which would have proved too much for the light craft. He waited for his niece at the landing-place, and carefully wrapped her in a mantle, lest she should take cold; then the boat having been made fast to the mooring post, the trio returned to the castle to lunch. It was delightful to see Alicia, who usually ate no more than a wren, put her pearly teeth into a slice of York ham cut thin as paper, and make away with a roll without leaving a single crumb for the gold fish in the basin.

How swiftly pass away happy days! Every week Paul postponed his departure; the glorious foliage in the park began to wear the russet livery of autumn, and light white mists rose in the morning from the lake. In spite of the constant raking in which the gardener indulged, the dead leaves strewed the gravel of the drive; innumerable little pearls of frost glittered upon the sward of the bowling green, and in the evening the magpies might be seen squabbling in the tops of the leafless trees.

Paul's anxious gaze saw Alicia growing paler, and her colour diminish to two little spots on her cheeks. She often felt chilly, and the hottest coal fire failed to

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warm her. The doctor seemed anxious, and his last prescription was to the effect that Alicia must spend the winter in Pisa and the spring in Naples.

Paul had been recalled to France by family affairs; Alicia and the Commodore were on their way to Italy, and the party had separated at Folkestone. No word had been spoken, but Alicia looked on herself as engaged to Paul, and the Commodore had squeezed his hand in significant fashion. It is only a son-in-law's fingers that one squeezes so unmercifully.

Paul, compelled to wait six long months, which to his impatience seemed six centuries, had had the delight of finding Alicia freed from the languor from which she had been suffering, and radiant with health. The child had made way wholly to the maiden, and he thought with intoxicating happiness that the Commodore would raise no objections when he should ask for her hand.

Lulled by these pleasant thoughts, he fell asleep and slept until day. Naples was already beginning its riot of noise; the sellers of iced water were shouting their ware; the keepers of cook-shops held out to the passers-by meats stuck on poles; bending from their windows, the lazy housekeepers lowered with

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a string their market baskets, which they drew up again laden with provisions, tomatoes, fish, and great pieces of pumpkin. The public scriveners, in rusty black coats and a pen behind their ear, sat down at their tables; the money changers were arranging in little piles, on their boards, grani, carlini, and ducats; the coachmen drove their skeleton horses at a gallop in quest of early customers, and the bells in every belfry were joyously ringing out the Angelus.

Paul, wrapped in his dressing-gown, leaned on the rail of the balcony. From his window he could see Santa Lucia Castello dell' Ove, and an immense stretch of sea as far as Mount Vesuvius and the blue promontory on which showed white the vast casini of Castellamare and the distant villas of Sorrento. The sky was free from clouds, save one light fleck that drew nearer the city, driven onwards by a faint breeze. Paul fixed upon it that strange glance to which I have before drawn attention. Forthwith other vapours united with the single cloudlet, and soon a dark pall of cloud stretched out over Castle Saint Elmo. Great drops of rain pattered down upon the lava pavement, and in a few minutes turned into one of the torrential rains which transform the streets of Naples into

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torrents, and sweep dogs, and even donkeys into the gutters. The surprised multitude of pedestrians scattered in search of shelter; the open-air stalls moved in haste, not without the loss of a part of their wares, and the rain, left in possession of the battle-field swept in white gusts upon the deserted quay of Santa Lucia.

The huge facchino whom Paddy had smitten with such vigour, and who was leaning under a balcony, somewhat sheltered by the projection, had not joined the universal rout and gazed with deeply meditative glance upon the window whereon Paul d'Aspremont was leaning.

His thoughts found expression in words which he grumbled out with an angry look: —

"The skipper of the 'Leopold' would have done better to chuck that *forestiere* overboard."

And putting his hand into the opening of his coarse linen shirt, he touched the bag of amulets hung round his neck by a string.

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IV

THE weather speedily cleared, in a few minutes the bright sunshine had dried the last drops of the shower, and the multitude again swarmed joyously upon the quay. But Timberio, the porter, seemed not to change his opinion of the young Frenchman, and prudently transported his penates beyond the range of the hotel windows. When some lazzaroni of his friends expressed surprise at his giving up a good stand in favour of one much less advantageous, he replied, shaking his head with a look of mystery: —

"Whoever wants it can have it; I know what I know."

Paul breakfasted in his room, either through reserve or disdain, for he did not care to mix with the public. Then he dressed, and while waiting until it was time for him to call on Miss Ward, he visited the Studj Museum. He admired rather inattentively the valuable collection of Campanian vases, the bronzes found in the ruins of Pompeii, the verdigrised brazen Greek

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helmet which still contains the head of the soldier that wore it, the piece of hardened mud that has preserved, like a mould, the imprint of the lovely torso of a young woman surprised by the eruption of Vesuvius in the country house of Arrius Diomedes, the Farnese Hercules and his wonderful muscles, the Flora, the archaic Minerva, the two Balbi, and the magnificent statue of Aristides, the most perfect work perhaps that antiquity has handed down to us. But a lover is not one to appreciate very enthusiastically the monuments of art; to him, the least glimpse of the beloved head is worth more than all the marbles of Greece and Rome.

Having managed somehow to wear out two or three hours in the Studj, he sprang into a carriage and started for the country house where dwelt Miss Ward. The coachman, with that quick perception of love that is characteristic of Southern natures, drove his Rosinantes at break-neck speed, and soon the carriage drew up in front of the pillars, surmounted by vases with aloes growing in them, that I have already described. The same servant came to open the gate; her hair still curled rebelliously, and, as before, her dress consisted simply of a coarse linen chemise with coloured thread

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embroideries on the sleeves and round the neck, and of a skirt of thick stuff, with transversal stripes, such as is worn by the women of Procida. Her legs, I must own were bare, and she trod the dust with feet that a sculptor would have admired. On her breast hung from a black cord a bundle of curiously shaped charms of horn and coral, on which, to Vicè's evident satisfaction, Paul's glance rested.

Miss Alicia was on the terrace, that being her favourite spot. An Indian hammock, of red and blue cotton, ornamented with feathers, was suspended from two of the pillars that supported the vine-leaf roof, and in it was swinging the young girl, dressed in a light wrapper of écru China silk, the accordion pleats of which she was pitilessly crushing. On her feet, the tips of which showed through the netting of the hammock, she wore slippers of aloe fibre, and her lovely bare arms were crossed above her head in the attitude of the Cleopatra of antiquity, for, although it was only the beginning of May, the heat was already extreme, and innumerable crickets were singing in shrill chorus in the neighbouring bushes.

The Commodore, in planter's dress, and seated on a cane arm-chair, pulled with great regularity the rope

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that set the hammock swinging, and the group was completed by a third personage, Count d'Altavilla, a young Neapolitan dandy, whose presence caused Paul's brows to contract in the fashion that gave him an expression of diabolical wickedness.

The Count, indeed, was one of those men whom one does not much care to see by the side of the woman one loves. He was of high stature and perfectly proportioned; his hair, as black as jet, and clustering in thick masses, set off his smooth and well-shapen forehead; the brilliant Neapolitan sun sparkled in his eyes, and his large, strong teeth, clear as pearls, shone the brighter by contrast with his crimson lips and his olive complexion. The one objection which a person of fastidious taste could have made to the Count was that he was too handsome.

As for his clothes, d'Altavilla sent to London for them, and the severest dandy would have approved of his get-up. The one Italian touch in his whole dress was his shirt studs, which were too costly and showy, betraying the Southerner's love of jewelry. It may be also that anywhere but in Naples people might have thought it in bad taste for him to be wearing a collection of bifurcated branches of coral, of hands, in Vesu-

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vius lava, with closed fingers or brandished dagger, of dogs lying down with outstretched paws, of bits of horn, black or white, and other similar trifles suspended from his watch chain by a ring, but it needed only a turn down the Strada di Toledo (Via di Roma), or along the Villa Reale to ascertain that the wearing of these charms was not a mark of eccentricity on the Count's part.

When Paul d'Aspremont came up, the Count, at Miss Ward's urgent request was singing one of those exquisite Neapolitan popular airs, whose author is nameless, and a single one of which, picked up by a composer, suffices to secure the success of an opera. Gordigiani's charming romances may give some idea of them to those who have not heard such airs sung by a lazzarone, a fisherman, or a trovatella on the Chiaja beach or on the pier. They are composed of the sigh of the breeze, a moonbeam, the scent of an orange tree and the beating of the heart.

Alicia, with her pretty English voice, which was not quite true, hummed the motive, that she wished to remember, and nodded in friendly fashion to Paul, who, annoyed at the presence of the handsome young man, looked at her with no very amiable glance.

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One of the cords of the hammock broke, and Miss Ward slipped to the ground, though without hurting herself, and six hands were simultaneously outstretched towards her. The young lady was already up, blushing rosy red, for it is "improper" to fall when men are present. Yet not one of the chaste folds of her dress was disarranged.

"I do not understand it," said the Commodore; "I tested the ropes myself, and Alicia is light as a feather."

Count d'Altavilla shook his head in a mysterious fashion, and though it was plain that he attributed the breaking of the rope to a very different cause than Miss Ward's weight, he kept silence, like a well-bred man that he was, and contented himself with rattling the bunch of charms on his chain.

Like all men who turn sulky and cross when in the company of a rival they fear may prove dangerous, instead of becoming more gracious and amiable, Paul d'Aspremont, although well used to society, could not manage to conceal his ill-temper. He replied in monosyllables, let the conversation fall, and when he looked at d'Altavilla, his glance assumed its sinister expression, and the yellow streaks twisted and writhed

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under the gray transparency of his eyes like water-snakes in a spring.

Every time Paul looked at him in that way, the Count, with a gesture apparently mechanical, plucked a flower from a jardinière that stood near him and threw it in such a way that it should cross the direction of the angry glance.

"What are you ravaging my jardinière for?" exclaimed Miss Ward, who observed his action. "What harm have my poor flowers done to you that you should behead them?"

"Nothing, Miss Ward; it is purely a nervous affection," answered the Count as he nipped off a superb rose which he sent flying after the other blooms.

"You make *me* dreadfully nervous," said Alicia, "and without knowing it, you are shocking one of my fancies. I have never picked a single flower; a bouquet inspires me with a sort of terror; the blooms of which it is composed are dead flowers, the bodies of roses, vervain or periwinkles, and their scent has something sepulchral."

"By way of expiating the murders I have just committed," said the Count with a bow, "I shall send you a hundred baskets of living flowers."

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Paul had risen, and was twisting the brim of his hat with a constrained look as though he intended to take leave.

"Surely you are not going already?" said Miss Ward.

"I have letters to write; important letters."

"That is a pretty thing to say," returned the young girl with a pout. "Are there any letters of importance save those you write to me?"

"Do stay, Paul," said the Commodore. "I have laid out a plan for the evening, subject to the approbation of my niece. I propose that we shall first go to drink a glass of water at the Santa Lucia fountain; it is true the water smells like rotten eggs, but it gives one an appetite. Then we shall go and eat a dozen or two of oysters, both white and red, at the fish-house, and dine in some thoroughly Neapolitan osteria, under an arbour, and drink Falernium and Lacryma Christi, winding up with a visit to Signor Pulcinello. The Count could explain to us the fine points of the dialect."

Mr. D'Aspremont did not seem to be much taken with the plan, and he withdrew with a cold bow. D'Altavilla remained a few moments longer, but as

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Miss Ward, put out at Paul's departure, did not adopt the Commodore's proposal, he also took his leave.

Two hours later, Alicia received an immense number of pots of the rarest plants in bloom, and what surprised her much more, a huge pair of horns of the Sicilian ox, transparent as jasper, and polished as agate, fully three feet in length and ending in menacing black points. They were splendidly mounted in gilded bronze, so that they could be placed, tips up, on a mantelpiece, a bracket, or a cornice.

Vicè, who had helped the porters to unpack both the flowers and the horns, seemed to understand the object of this curious gift, and placed the superb crescents, which might have been thought to have belonged to the divine bull that bore away Europa, full in sight on the stone table, and said: —

"Now we are properly protected."

"What do you mean, Vicè?" asked Miss Ward.

"Nothing, except that the French signor has very queer eyes."

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V

THE hour for meals had long since passed, and the coal fires that during the day turned the kitchen of the Hôtel de Rome into a crater of Vesuvius, were slowly dying out in glowing embers under the sheet-iron extinguishers. The stew-pans had been hung on their respective nails and glittered like a row of bucklers on the rail of a trireme. A yellow brass lamp, like those found in the ruins of Pompeii, was suspended by a triple chain to the main beam in the ceiling, and with its three wicks dipping into the oil, lighted up the centre of the great kitchen, the corners of which remained in shadow.

The luminous beams falling from above illumined, with most picturesque play of light and shade, a group of characteristic figures collected around the thick wooden table, cut and slashed in every direction with knife marks, and that stood in the centre of the great hall whose walls the smoke of the cooking had turned to the dark brown so dear to the painters of Caravaggio's school. Unquestionably neither Spagnoletto nor

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Salvator Rosa, with their bold love of truth, would have disdained the models collected there by chance, or, to be more accurate, by nightly custom.

First, there was the *chef*, Virgilio Falsacappa, a very important personage, of colossal stature and tremendous size, who, had he but worn a Roman toga instead of a white duck jacket, might have passed for one of the guests of Vitellius. His strongly marked features formed a sort of serious caricature of the types of certain medals of antiquity; his eyes, cut like those in stage masks, were topped by bushy black eyebrows sticking out half an inch; an enormous nose overshadowed a broad mouth apparently provided with three rows of teeth like a shark's. A dewlap, as deep as that of the Farnese bull, joined the chin — in which was a dimple fit to hold a fist — with a muscular neck, heavily veined and athletic-looking. Bushy whiskers, each of which would have sufficed to provide a sapper with a reasonable beard, framed in the face, which was marked with violet spots. His hair was black, curly, and shiny, mingled with a few silvery threads, and clustered on his head in short curls, while his bull neck, with its three deep wrinkles, overlapped the collar of his jacket. In the lobes of his ears, pushed

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up by the protuberances of a pair of jaws capable of chewing up an ox in the course of a day, glittered silver rings as large as the disc of the moon. Such was Master Virgilio Falsacappa, who, with his apron pulled up on the hip and his knife stuck in a wooden sheath, looked more like a torturer than a cook.

Next came Timberio, the porter, who, thanks to the exercise necessitated by his trade and the sobriety of his regimen, — consisting of a handful of half cooked macaroni, dusted over with cacio-cavallo, a slice of water-melon and a glass of snow-water, — was comparatively thin, but who, if well-fed, would certainly have been as stout as Falsacappa, so truly did his huge frame seem intended to upbear an enormous bulk of flesh. His dress consisted simply of a pair of drawers, a long brown stuff vest, and a coarse cloak thrown over his shoulder.

Striking also was the appearance of Scazziga, the coachman who drove Paul d'Aspremont, and who was leaning against the table. He had a clever face, but irregular features with an expression of simplicity and craftiness combined; a feigned smile flitted on his mocking lips, and his agreeable manners showed that

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he was constantly serving well bred people. His garments, purchased from a dealer in second-hand clothing, had a look of livery about them of which he was particularly proud, and which, in his opinion, placed him a long way higher up the social scale than the rough Timberio. He sprinkled his talk with English and French words that did not always fit in with the meaning of his remarks, but which none the less excited the admiration of the kitchen maids and scullions, who were amazed at his wonderful knowledge.

Somewhat in the background stood two young maids whose features, though of course less noble, recalled the well known type of the heads on Syracusan coins: the low forehead, the nose running straight from the brow, the somewhat thick lips, the broad, full chin. Their blackish blue hair was dressed in bandeaux, which met behind their heads in heavy chignons, stuck with coral-headed pins, and triple necklaces of the same material were wound round their caryatid-like necks, the muscles of which were strengthened by their habit of carrying their burdens upon their heads. No doubt dandies would have looked with contempt at these poor girls in whose veins ran the untainted

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blood of the splendid races of fair Greece, but an artist, on seeing them, would at once have pulled out his sketch-book.

If my reader has ever seen that painting by Murillo in which angels are cooking, I need not describe the heads of the three or four curly-headed scullions who completed the group.

The company was discussing a serious question which concerned Mr. Paul d'Aspremont, the French traveller who had come in the steamer. The kitchen was sitting in judgment upon the guest.

It was Timberio, the porter, who was speaking, and he paused between each of his remarks, like a popular orator, in order to allow his hearers to thoroughly grasp their full meaning, and to express assent or dissent.

"Follow me carefully," the orator was just then saying. "The 'Leopold' is an honest Tuscan steamer, against which there is nothing to be said, save that it carries round too many English heretics."

"English heretics spend their money freely," put in Scazziga, whom the receipt of tips rendered more tolerant.

"No doubt; the least a heretic can do when a Chris-

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tian works for him, is to reward him handsomely, so as to diminish the humiliation."

"It does not humiliate me to drive a *forestiere* in my carriage. I do not follow the trade of beast of burden like you."

"Am I not just as good a Christian as you?" replied the porter, frowning and clenching his fists.

"Let Timberio have his say," chorussed the rest of the company, afraid of seeing the interesting account turn into a dispute.

"You will allow," continued the orator, soothed by this, "that the weather was superb when the 'Leopold' entered the harbour."

"Certainly, Timberio," said the *chef* with majestic condescension.

"The sea was smooth as glass," continued the facchino; "yet a huge billow tossed Gennaro's boat so roughly that he fell overboard with two or three of his comrades. Is that not out of the way? For Gennaro is a seaman and could dance the tarantella on a yard without the help of a balancing-pole."

"Perhaps he had drunk a little too much Asprino," put in Scazziga, the rationalist of the company.

"He had not even had a glass of lemonade," went

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on Timberio. "But there was on board that steamer a gentleman who looked at him in a peculiar fashion. You take me?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the chorus, every one of them extending the first and fourth fingers together as if drilled to the business.

"Now that gentleman was no other than Mr. Paul d'Aspremont," added Timberio.

"The one in number three," asked the *chef*, "who has his dinner in his room?"

"The very same," replied the younger and prettier of the maids. "Never have I come across a sourer, more disagreeable and more conceited man; he never said a word to me or even looked at me, and yet I am well worth looking at, say all the gentlemen."

"You are worth a good deal more than that, my lovely Gelsomina," said Timberio gallantly; "but it is lucky for you that the stranger did not look at you."

"You are altogether too superstitious," interjected Scazziga, whose intercourse with foreigners had made him something of a sceptic.

"And by dint of frequenting heretics, *you* will end in not believing in Saint Januarius."

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"Because Gennaro happened to tumble overboard, that is no reason for attributing an evil influence to Mr. Paul d'Aspremont," went on Scazziga, standing up for his customer.

"You want more proof, do you? Well, this morning I saw him at the window, looking at a cloudlet no larger than a down-flake out of a burst pillow, when at once black clouds collected and it rained so hard that the dogs could drink standing up."

But Scazziga was not yet convinced and shook his head incredulously.

"And the servant is no better than his master," went on Timberio. "The booted monkey must be in league with the devil, or he could never have knocked me out, when I could kill him with a flip of the finger."

"I am of Timberio's opinion," said the *chef*, majestically. "The stranger eats little; he sent down the stuffed zucchetti, the chicken stew, and the macaroni and tomatoes which I had myself prepared for him. There must be some reason for such sobriety. Why should a rich man refuse tasty dishes and content himself with egg soup and a slice of cold meat?"

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"He is red-haired," said Gelsomina, as she passed her hand through her own thick raven locks.

"And a bit goggle-eyed," added Pepita, the other maid.

"And his eyes are very close to his nose," went on Timberio.

"And the wrinkle between his eyebrows is in the shape of a horse-shoe," said, by way of completing the indictment, the huge Virgilio Falsacappa. "Therefore he is —"

"Do not say the word; there is no need of it," cried the chorus, save and except the still incredulous Scazziga. "We shall be on our guard."

"And to think that I should get into trouble with the police," said Timberio, "if I were to let drop a three-hundred pound trunk on the head of that accursed *forestiere*."

"It is pretty risky in Scazziga to go about driving him," put in Gelsomina.

"I am on my box; he can see my back only, and his glance cannot cross mine at the right angle. Besides, I do not believe in the whole business."

"You are a heathen, Scazziga," said the huge Palforio, the Herculean cook. "You will come to a bad end."

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While the servants were thus engaged in discussing him, Paul, whose temper had been upset by finding Count d'Altavilla with Miss Ward, had gone for a walk at the Villa Reale, and more than once the wrinkle between his brows deepened and his glance became fixed. He thought he caught sight of Alicia in a carriage with the Count, and he hurried to the carriage door, putting on his eye-glasses to make sure he was not mistaken. It was not Alicia, however, but a lady who, at a distance, resembled her. The horses, no doubt startled by Paul's rush, bolted.

Paul sat down to eat an ice at the Cafe de l'Europe, on the Palace Square. A number of persons looked at him attentively, and then changed their seats, making a curious gesture at the same time.

He entered the Pulcinella Theatre, where a play *tutto da ridere* was being performed. The actor got confused in the middle of his comic improvisation and remained dumb. He pulled himself together, however, but in the very middle of one of his by-plays, his black false nose came off and he found it impossible to replace it. By way of excusing himself he explained the cause of the accident by a rapid gesture, for Paul's glance, now fixed upon him, prevented his

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going on. The spectators nearest Paul vanished one after another. He rose to go out, unconscious of the effect he was producing, and in the lobby he heard people whispering a strange word, the meaning of which he did not understand: —

"A jettatore! a jettatore!"

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VI

THE day after he had sent her the horns, Count d'Altavilla paid Miss Ward a visit. He found the young English lady drinking tea with her uncle, exactly as if she had been in a yellow brick house at Ramsgate, instead of in Naples upon a whitewashed terrace, and surrounded by fig trees, cacti, and aloes, for one of the distinguishing traits of the Anglo-Saxon race is the persistence of its habits, however contrary to the climate they may be. The Commodore was beaming. By means of artificial ice, manufactured with the aid of a chemical apparatus — for snow only is brought from the mountains behind Castellamare — he had succeeded in keeping the butter in a solid condition, and he was just then engaged in spreading a pat of it upon a thin slice of bread.

After the first commonplaces which form the preface of every conversation, and which resemble the preludes with which pianists try an instrument before they

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begin their performance, Alicia, suddenly breaking away from conventionalities, abruptly asked the young Neapolitan Count: —

"What do you mean by the strange gift of a pair of horns that came with the flowers? All I could get out of my maid Vicè was that they are a preservative against the *fascino*."

"Vicè is right," replied the Count d'Altavilla with a bow.

"But what is the fascino?" went on the young lady. "I am not familiar with your superstitions — your African notions, for no doubt it has to do with some popular belief."

"The fascino is the pernicious influence exercised by a person endowed, or afflicted rather, with the evil eye."

"I am pretending to understand you, so that you will not have too low an opinion of my capacity if I confess that the meaning of your words escapes me," said Alicia. "You explain the unknown by the unknown, and *evil eye* is, so far as I am concerned, as unintelligible as the expression *fascino*. Like the character in the play, I understand Latin, but please speak as if I did not."

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"I shall explain myself as clearly as possible," replied d'Altavilla; "only pray do not, with British contempt, mistake me for a barbarian, and do not wonder whether under my clothes my skin is tattooed red and blue. I am a civilised man; I was educated in Paris; I speak both French and English; I have read Voltaire; I believe in steam engines, in railways, and in a double Chamber, just like Stendhal; I eat macaroni with a fork; in the morning I wear Suède gloves, coloured kid in the afternoon, and straw-coloured kid in the evening."

The Commodore, who was buttering a second slice of bread, was attracted by this strange preface, and he remained with his knife in the air, gazing at d'Altavilla with his Northern blue eyes, the shade of which contrasted so funnily with his brick-like complexion.

"Your account of yourself is quite reassuring," said Miss Ward with a smile, "and it would be very rude of me to suspect you of being a barbarian. But surely you must have something very dreadful to tell me, or else something very absurd, to indulge in such circumlocutions before coming to the point."

"You are right; it is very terrible, very absurd, and even very ridiculous, which is worse," answered the

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Count; "and were I with you in London or Paris, I dare say I should laugh at it with you, but here in Naples—"

"You will remain serious. Is not that what you were going to say?"

"Exactly."

"Well, let us get to the fascino," said Miss Ward, impressed, in spite of herself, by the Count's gravity.

"The belief is one that goes back to the farthest antiquity; it is alluded to in the Bible. Vergil mentions it as one who firmly believes in it; the bronze amulets found in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiæ, the protective signs drawn on the houses that have been cleared out, show how widespread that superstition was formerly." D'Altavilla slyly laid stress upon the word *superstition*. "The whole of the East still credits it to-day. Red or green hands are placed upon each front of Moorish houses in order to avert the evil influence. On the Gate of Judgment, in the Alhambra, there is a hand carved on the keystone, which is a proof that if the belief is not well grounded, it is at least very ancient. When an opinion has been held by millions of men for thousands of years, it is probable that it rests upon some positive facts, upon a long

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series of observations borne out by events. However well I may think of myself, I find it somewhat difficult to believe that so many persons, some of whom, unquestionably, were illustrious, enlightened, and learned, should have been so egregiously mistaken in the matter and that I alone should see it clearly."

"There is an obvious retort to your argument," broke in Miss Ward. "Was not polytheism the religion believed in by Hesiod, Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates himself, — as witness his sacrificing a cock to Esculapius, —and numberless other men of undoubted genius?"

"That is true; but no one nowadays sacrifices bulls to Jupiter."

"They are better made into beefsteaks and rumpsteaks," sagely remarked the Commodore, who had always been shocked at the custom of burning the fat legs of victims upon coals, as related by Homer.

"Doves are no longer offered to Venus, nor peacocks to Juno, nor he-goats to Bacchus; Christianity has replaced the fair marble dreams with which Greece had filled Olympus. Truth has caused error to disappear, and yet innumerable people still fear the effects of the fascino, or, as it is popularly called, *jettatura*."

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"I can understand that the ignorant multitude should fear such an influence," said Miss Ward; "but that a man of your rank and education should share the belief is what amazes me."

"Many who claim to be strong-minded," replied the Count, "hang horns in their windows, nail antlers above their door, and go about covered with amulets. For my part, I make no bones about it, and I am not ashamed to own that when I meet a jettatore, I prefer to cross over to the other side of the street, and that if I cannot avoid his glance, I do my best to conjure it by making the conventional sign; I do it just as readily as would a lazzarone, and I am the safer for it. Numerous misadventures have taught me not to disdain such precautions."

Miss Alicia Ward was a Protestant, brought up in great philosophical freedom of thought, and trained to admit nothing save after examination, so that her lucid reasoning powers rebelled against whatever could not be mathematically explained. The Count's remarks caused her surprise, and at first she assumed that he was merely trying to be amusing, but his calm and convinced manner showed her she was mistaken, though he failed to convince her.

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"I grant you," she said, "that the prejudice exists and that it is very widespread; that you are sincerely afraid of the evil eye, and that you are not trying to play upon the credulity of a stranger. But you must give me some physical reason for the existence of this superstitious idea, for, even at the cost of being considered by you wholly devoid of poetic feeling, I am very incredulous. The fantastic, the mysterious, the occult, the inexplicable have very little hold upon me."

"You surely admit, Miss Ward," went on the Count, "the power of the human eye? The light of heaven mingles in it with the reflection of the soul; the pupil is a lens which concentrates the beams of life, and intellectual electricity flashes forth from that small opening. Does not a woman's glance pierce the hardest heart? Does not a hero's inspire a whole army? Does not the physician's look tame a madman as effectually as a cold douche? Does not a mother's glance repel lions?"

"You plead your cause eloquently," answered Miss Ward, shaking her pretty head. "But you must forgive me if I still entertain doubts."

"What of the bird, then, that, fluttering with terror

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and uttering pitiful cries, descends from the top of the tree whence it might fly away, to fall into the maw of the serpent that fascinates it? Is it impelled by a prejudice? Has it heard stories of jettatura told in the nests of the feathery gossips? Is not the cause of many an effect beyond the grasp of our organs? Are the miasmata of malaria, of plague, of cholera visible? No eye can see the electric fluid on the lightning rod, yet the electricity is drawn down it. Why is it absurd to suppose that from the black, blue, or gray disc called the eye there issues a beam that may be beneficent or deadly? Why should not that effluvium be fortunate or unfortunate according to the mode of its emission and the angle at which it impinges upon the object it strikes?"

"It seems to me," said the Commodore, "that there is something to be said in favour of the Count's argument. For my part, I have never been able to look at a toad's yellow eyes without feeling intolerable heat in the stomach, just as if I had swallowed an emetic; yet the poor reptile had more reason to fear than I, since I could crush it with my heel."

"Ah! uncle," said Miss Ward, "if you are going to side with Count d'Altavilla, I shall have the worst

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of it. I am not fit to cope with the two of you. Although I might raise many an objection to that ocular electricity of which no physicist has spoken, I am willing, for the sake of argument, to admit its existence; but I do not perceive in what way the huge horns with which you have presented me can efficaciously protect one against its fatal effects."

"Just as the point of the lightning-rod diverts the lightning, so do the sharp points of the horns upon which the jettatore's glance falls divert the malevolent fluid and deprive it of its dangerous electricity. Outstretched fingers and coral amulets perform the same service."

"What you have been telling me, Count," returned Miss Ward, "is very mysterious, but so far as I can make it out, I am under the spell of a most dangerous jettatore, and you sent me the horns to protect me against him."

"I fear that is the case," replied the Count, with an accent of deep conviction.

"I should just like to see one of those squinting rascals trying to fascinate my niece," exclaimed the Commodore. "I am over sixty, but I have not yet forgotten how to strike straight from the shoulder."

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And as he said this, he closed his fist, pressing his thumb against the folded fingers.

"Two fingers are enough, sir," said d'Altavilla; at the same time placing the Commodore's fingers in the correct position. "Jettatura is usually an unconscious act, and is exercised unwittingly by those who possess the fatal gift. Often, indeed, jettatori deplore its effects more than any one else, once they have become aware of their deadly power. They should therefore be avoided, not ill treated. Besides, their influence may be neutralised or at least attenuated, by horns, outstretched fingers, or forked branches of coral."

"Very strange, in truth," said the Commodore, impressed in spite of himself by d'Altavilla's seriousness.

"I was not aware that I was so greatly haunted by jettatori. I scarcely ever leave the terrace, save, in the evening, to drive with my uncle along the Villa Reale, and I have never noticed anything that might justify your belief," said the young lady, whose curiosity was awakened, though she was as incredulous as ever. "To whom do your suspicions point?"

"They are not suspicions, Miss Ward; I am absolutely certain," replied the Neapolitan Count.

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"Pray, then, reveal to us the name of the fatal being," returned Miss Ward, with a trace of mockery.

D'Altavilla remained silent.

"It is well to know whom we should be on our guard against," added the Commodore.

The young nobleman appeared to be thinking deeply; then rose, walked up to Miss Ward's uncle, bowed respectfully to him, and said: —

"Sir, I have the honour to ask for your niece's hand in marriage."

At this unexpected request, Alicia blushed rosy red and the Commodore's face turned scarlet, from red that it had been.

Undoubtedly Count d'Altavilla might be a suitor for Miss Ward's hand; he belonged to one of the oldest and noblest families in Naples; he was handsome, young, wealthy, and in favour at Court; he was thoroughly well bred, and irreproachable in demeanour. His request, therefore, was entirely proper, but it came so suddenly, so strangely, it had apparently so little to do with the conversation that had been going on, that the amazement of uncle and niece was justified. Nor did d'Altavilla appear either surprised or discouraged by it, and he awaited the reply with firm mien.

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"My dear Count," at last said the Commodore, when he had somewhat recovered from his surprise, "your request astonishes as well as honours me. The truth is that I do not know how to answer you; I have not consulted my niece. We were talking of fascino, jettatura, horns, amulets, open and closed hands, of all sorts of things that have nothing to do with marriage, and then all of a sudden you ask me for Alicia's hand! That is not logical, and you must not be annoyed if I am somewhat mixed. The match would certainly be quite suitable, but I fancied my niece had other intentions. It is true, on the other hand, that an old seadog like me is not one to read fluently a young girl's heart —"

Alicia, perceiving that her uncle was floundering about, profited by his pausing for breath to put an end to a situation that was becoming embarrassing, and said to the Neapolitan: —

"Count, when a gentleman loyally asks for an honest girl's hand, she has no right to take offence, but she may feel surprise at the strange manner in which the request is made. I was asking you to tell me the name of the jettatore whose influence, according to you, may prove fatal to me, and you suddenly prefer to my

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uncle a request the motive for which I do not clearly perceive."

"My reason is," answered d'Altavilla, "that a gentleman does not care to denounce another man, and that a husband alone has the right to defend his wife. But pray take some time before deciding. Until then the horns, placed in a sufficiently conspicuous place, will, I believe, avail to protect you against any unfortunate consequences."

Whereupon the Count rose, bowed low, and went out.

Vicè, the crinkly-haired maid, who was coming to clear away the tea things, had heard the end of the conversation as she was slowly ascending the terrace steps. She nourished against Paul d'Aspremont the fullest aversion natural in an Abruzzi peasant, scarcely tamed by two or three years of domestic service, for a *forestiere* suspected of jettatura. Besides, she thought Count d'Altavilla a splendid man, and could not understand that Miss Ward should prefer to him a pale, meagre fellow whom she, Vicè, would not have had anything to do with, even had he not had the fascino. Therefore, unappreciative of Count d'Altavilla's delicate methods, and desiring to withdraw her mistress, whom

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she loved, from a hurtful influence, Vicè bent to Miss Ward's ear and said to her: —

"I know the name that Count d'Altavilla will not tell you."

"And I forbid you to speak it, Vicè, if you care to retain my favour," answered Alicia. "Such superstitions are positively shameful, and I shall brave them like a Christian girl who fears God alone."

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VII

JETTATORE! Jettatore! These words were certainly addressed to me," said Paul d'Aspremont to himself, as he returned to his hotel. "What they mean I do not know, but they were evidently intended for an insult or a mockery. What is there strange, peculiar, or ridiculous about me that attracts such unpleasant attention? Though one is not a good judge of one's self, it seems to me that I am neither handsome nor ugly, neither tall nor short, neither stout nor thin, and that I ought to be able to go about without attracting notice. There is nothing eccentric in my dress; I am not adorned with a turban with lighted tapers, like Mr. Jourdain in the ceremonial scene in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme;* I do not wear a jacket with a sun embroidered in gold on the back; I do not go about with a negro in front of me playing on the cymbals. My personality, which, for the matter of that, is wholly unknown in Naples, is concealed under the ordinary dress, the domino of modern civilisation, and I am in every respect like the

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dandies who walk up and down the Strada di Toledo or on the Largo del Palazzo Reale, save that I have a rather quieter necktie, not so large a breastpin, a less gorgeously embroidered shirt-front, not so loud a waistcoat, not so many gold chains, and that my hair is very much less curled.

"That may be it! My hair is perhaps not curled enough. To-morrow I shall have it done up by the hair-dresser in the hotel.

"Yet the people here are used to seeing strangers, and a few slight differences in my dress do not account for the mysterious word and the strange gesture called out by my presence. Besides, I have noticed an expression of antipathy and terror on the faces of the people who drew out of my way. What can I possibly have done to them, since I have never met them before? Everywhere a traveller — who is but a passing shadow that returns not — excites indifference only, unless he happens to come from some distant place and is of an unknown race; and every week the steamers land on the pier thousands of tourists in every respect like me. Nobody troubles about them, save the facchini, the hotel-keepers, and the guides. I have not killed my brother, for I never had one;

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consequently I cannot be bearing about the brand of Cain upon my brow. Yet men are startled at sight of me and move away. I do not remember having ever produced such an effect in Paris, London, Vienna, or in any of the towns where I have lived. I have been thought proud, disdainful, reserved at times. I have been told that I affected the English sneer, that I was aping Lord Byron, but everywhere I have been received as a gentleman should be, and my advances, though infrequent, have been all the more appreciated on that account. Surely the three days' trip from Marseilles to Naples cannot have altered me to the extent of having become odious or grotesque, for more than one woman has ere now singled me out, and I have won the heart of Alicia Ward, a charming girl, a heavenly creature, one of Thomas Moore's angels!"

These reflections, undoubtedly quite sensible, somewhat calmed Paul d'Aspremont, and he succeeded in convincing himself that he had attached to the exaggerated pantomime of the Neapolitans, who gesticulate more than any other people, a wholly gratuitous meaning.

It was late. All the guests, save Paul, had retired to their rooms, and Gelsomina, one of the servants

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whose portrait I sketched in the account of the kitchen council presided over by Virgilio Falsacappa, was waiting to lock the doors as soon as Paul should have returned. Nanella, the other maid, whose turn it was to sit up, had begged her braver companion to take her place, as she herself desired to avoid the *forestiere* who was suspected of jettatura. Gelsomina, therefore, was armed at all points; a huge bunch of amulets bristled on her bosom; five little coral horns hung, instead of vine leaves, from the facetted pearls in her ears; her hand, ready outstretched, extended its fore and fourth fingers in a position so accurate that it would certainly have met with commendation from the reverend Father Andrea de Jorio, author of the *Mimicha degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano.*

The brave Gelsomina, concealing her hand behind a fold of her skirt, handed the candlestick to Mr. d'Aspremont, and fixed upon him a sharp, steady, almost provocative glance, so singular in its expression that the young man cast down his eyes, a result that appeared to give remarkable pleasure to the handsome girl. As she stood there, motionless and erect, holding out the candlestick with a statuesque gesture, her profile brought out by the light, her glance fixed and

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flashing, she looked like the Nemesis of antiquity overawing a criminal.

When d'Aspremont had ascended the stairs and the sound of his footsteps had died out, Gelsomina threw back her head with an air of triumph, and said: —

"Well, I fairly looked him down, that ugly fellow, whom may Saint Januarius confound. I am sure no harm will come to me."

Paul had a bad night of it, and his slumbers were troubled by all sorts of strange, tormenting dreams connected with the thoughts that had filled his mind during the course of the evening. He seemed to be surrounded by monstrous, grimacing faces expressing hatred, anger, and terror; then these would vanish, and he saw himself threatened by long, lean, bony fingers, with knotty joints, that came out of the darkness, reddened by a light of Hell, and making cabalistic signs. The nails on these fingers, curved like tigers' claws and vultures' talons, came closer and closer to his face and appeared to seek to tear his eyes out. By a supreme effort he managed to brush aside these hands that were winged like bats, but the hands were followed by heads of bulls, buffaloes, and stags, the whitened skulls filled with a life that was death, and which,

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goring him with horns or antlers, forced him to leap into the sea, where he tore his limbs upon a forest of coral with pointed or bifurcated branches. Then a billow would cast him ashore, worn out, broken, half dead, and, like Byron's Don Juan, he seemed to see, in his fainting condition, a lovely head bending down over him. It was that, not of Haidee, but of Alicia, more beautiful than the imaginary being created by the poet. The maiden strove in vain to draw up on the sand the body the sea endeavoured to snatch back, and called on Vicè, the tawny maid, to help her, but the latter refused with ferocious laughter. Alicia's strength gave way, and Paul fell back into the waters.

These confused and terrifying fancies, horrible in their vagueness, and others still more vague, and recalling the shapeless phantoms that half emerge from the dense shadows of Goya's aquatintas, tortured the dreamer until early dawn. His soul, freed by the exhaustion of the body, appeared to divine what his waking thought failed to understand, and strove to translate its presentiments into images in the camera obscura of dreams.

Paul rose tired out, uneasy, dimly conscious of some mystery in these nightmares, but not daring to sound it.

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He turned round and round the fatal secret, closing his eyes in order not to see, and closing his ears in order not to hear it. Never had he felt so depressed. He even lost faith in Alicia; the Count's air of satisfied conceit, the complaisant manner in which the young girl listened to him, the approving air of the Commodore, all these things recurred to him full of painful particulars, filled his heart with bitterness, and deepened his melancholy.

Day has the power to dispel troubles caused by the visions of the night. When the dawn's golden shafts flash into the room through the parted curtains, Smarra, annoyed, flees away flapping its bat-like wings. The sun was shining joyously, the sky was clear, and the blue sea sparkled with innumerable spangles. Little by little Paul grew calmer; he forgot his painful dreams and the strange impressions felt the evening before, or, when he did give a thought to them, he blamed himself for his folly in dwelling upon them.

He took a turn round Chiaja to enjoy the Neapolitan excitability. The dealers were crying their wares in queer musical phrases in a popular dialect unintelligible to Paul, who knew Italian only, and with excited gestures and a fury of pantomime unknown in the North.

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But every time he stopped before a shop, the dealer looked alarmed, murmured an imprecation in a low voice, and stretched out his first and fourth fingers as if he were about to stab Paul with them. The women, bolder, overwhelmed him with insults and shook their fists in his face.

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VIII

ON hearing himself insulted by the Chiaja people, Mr. d'Aspremont imagined that they were addressing to him the coarsely burlesque litanies to which fishwives treat well-dressed persons who happen to traverse the market, but the lively repulsion, the genuine terror visible on every face compelled him to seek some other explanation. He heard once more, but with a threatening accent, the word *jettatore*, which had already struck upon his ear at the San Carlo Theatre; he therefore slowly walked away, without letting his glance, the cause of so much trouble, rest upon anything.

As he passed along the houses trying to escape attention, he came upon a second-hand book-stall. He stopped, turned over and opened some of the books, by way of pulling himself together. He thus turned his back upon the passers-by, and as he half-concealed his face within the pages of the volume, he avoided insult. He had for one moment thought of using his stick upon the shoulders of the rabble, but an undefin-

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able superstitious terror that was beginning to lay hold of him had restrained him. He remembered that once, having struck an insolent driver with a light switch, he had hit him on the temple and killed him on the spot, an involuntary murder he had never got over.

Having picked up and put back a number of books in the boxes, he came upon Signor Niccolo Valetta's treatise on *jettatura*, the title of which seemed to flash up before him, as if the book had been placed there by the hand of Fate. He threw to the dealer, who was looking at him with a sarcastic expression of countenance, and rattling the three or four black horns that hung with other charms upon his watch-chain, the six or eight carlini he asked for the book, and hurried back to his hotel to begin the study which was to clear away the doubts which had worried him since his arrival in Naples.

Valetta's book is as widely read in Naples as the *Secrets of Albertus the Great*, *Etteila* or the *Key to Dreams* in Paris. Valetta gives a definition of jettatura, shows by what means it may be recognised, and what are the methods to be resorted to for protection. He divides jettatori into several classes, in accordance with

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their power for evil, and discusses every point in connection with this important subject.

If d'Aspremont had come across this book in Paris, he would have glanced carelessly through it as through an old almanac stuffed full of nonsensical tales, and have laughed at the serious manner in which the author treated of such absurdities. But in his present condition, away from his usual surroundings, prepared to credulity by numberless trifling incidents, he perused it with secret horror, like some profane person spelling out of a black-letter folio formulæ for the evocation of spirits and other cabalistic performances. Though he had not sought to penetrate them, the secrets of Hell were being revealed to him, and he was now aware of his fatal gift; he was a jettatore! He had to own it to himself, for he possessed every one of the distinctive marks described by Valetta.

It sometimes happens that a man who believes himself to be enjoying the best of health, opens by chance a medical work and, on reading the pathological description of some disease, perceives that he is suffering from it. Enlightened by the dread knowledge, he feels, as he notes each symptom in the tale, some hidden portion of his organs, some concealed fibre, the

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play of which he was ignorant of, quiver with pain, and he turns pale at the thought that death, which he had fancied far distant, is near. Paul experienced just such a feeling.

He went to the mirror and looked at himself with terrifying intensity. The dissonant perfection of features, composed of beauties not usually found together, made him more than ever like the fallen archangel and gleamed with sinister fire out of the dark depths of the mirror. The rays in his pupils writhed like vipers; his eyebrows quivered like a bow from which the deadly shaft has just been shot; the white line in his forehead recalled a cicatrice due to a thunderbolt, and flames of Hell seemed to burn in his auburn hair, while the marble pallor of his complexion brought out more startlingly still each feature of his absolutely terrifying face.

He was frightened at himself. It seemed to him that his glance, reflected by the mirror, returned to him like a poisoned arrow. Imagine Medusa looking at her own hideous, yet charming face in the ruddy reflection of a brazen shield!

It may be objected that it is difficult to believe that a young man of the world, educated in the truths of modern science, and who had lived in the very midst

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of a sceptical civilisation, could accept seriously a popular prejudice, and fancy himself endowed with a mysterious deadly power; but to that I answer that common belief exercises an irresistible power of magnetism which masters a man in spite of himself, and with which the individual will cannot always cope successfully. A man may arrive in Naples laughing jettatura to scorn, and end by surrounding himself with horned preventives and by fleeing from every individual whose glance he suspects of evil. But Paul d'Aspremont was in a much more serious situation: he was himself possessed of the fascino, and every one avoided him or made in his presence the protective signs recommended by Signor Valetta. His common-sense rebelled at the thought, yet he could not help acknowledging that he bore every mark characteristic of a jettatore. The human mind, even when most enlightened, has always some dark nook in which crouch the hideous monsters of credulity and where cling the bats of superstition. Ordinary life itself is so full of problems that cannot be solved that impossibility becomes probability. A man may deny everything or believe in everything; from a certain point of view dreams are as true as reality.

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Profound melancholy overpowered Paul. He was a monster! Though endowed with a most affectionate disposition and the kindest of hearts, he nevertheless bore misfortune wherever he went. His glance, unconsciously filled with venom, was fatal to those upon whom it rested, even when he looked kindly upon them. He suffered from the horrible privilege of collecting, concentrating, and distilling the morbid miasmas, the dangerous electricity, the fatal influences of the ambient air and scattered them around. A number of incidents in his life, which until now had been unintelligible to him and which he had attributed to chance, now stood out in hideous clearness. He remembered all manner of strange misadventures, of unexplained misfortunes, of causeless catastrophes the reason of which he now understood. Startling coincidences occurred to his mind and confirmed the unhappy opinion he now had of himself.

He went back over his life year by year. He recalled his mother who had died in giving him birth; the unfortunate fate of his young schoolfellows: the one he loved best had been killed by a fall from a tree while he, Paul, was watching him climb it. He recalled the boating excursion on which he had started

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so joyously with two of his comrades, and from which he had returned alone, after making desperate efforts to drag from the weeds the bodies of the two poor lads drowned by the upsetting of the craft; the assault at arms in which his foil, the button of which had broken off and transformed the weapon into a sword, had so dangerously wounded his opponent, a young man whom he loved dearly. Unquestionably there could be no rational explanation of these events, although Paul had hitherto believed there was. Now, however, the apparently fortuitous and accidental character of these events appeared to him to depend upon another cause, which he had learned since he had read Valetta's book. The deadly influence, the fascino, the jettatura had evidently a share in these catastrophes. Such a persistent series of misfortunes in connection with one and the same individual was *unnatural.*

A still more recent circumstance recurred to his memory in all its horrible details, and contributed largely to strengthen his unhappy belief.

He often used to attend the performances at Her Majesty's Theatre, in London, having been struck by the grace of a young English ballet-dancer. Without being more taken with her than a man is with a charm-

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ing figure in a painting or an engraving, he had got into the habit of following her with his eyes in the midst of her companions in the ballet, through the wildering maze of the evolutions of the dance. He had got fond of her sad, gentle face, of her delicate pallor which the exertion of the dance never flushed, of her beautiful silky, shining fair locks, crowned, as the case might be, with stars or flowers, of her glance that lost itself in space, of her limbs that shyly lifted the clouds of gauze and shone under the silk like the marble limbs of some statue of antiquity. Every time she flashed past the footlights, he saluted her with a quiet, furtive sign of admiration, or put up his glasses in order to see her better.

One night, in the circular flight of a waltz, the dancer swept closer to the dazzling line of fire that, in a theatre, separates the world of reality from the realm of fancy. Her airy sylph-like draperies fluttered like the wings of a dove about to take to flight, when a tongue of flame shot up, blue and white, and reached the light stuff. In an instant the young girl was wrapped in flames; she danced on for a second like a will o' the wisp in the midst of a ruddy blaze, and then, terrified, rushed to the

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wings, crazed with fright and was burned alive in her blazing garments.

Paul had been deeply grieved by the accident, of which the newspapers of the day all spoke, and in which the name of the victim may be found by any one curious to know it. But his sorrow was unmixed with remorse, and he did not suppose he had in the least degree contributed to an accident which he regretted more than any one else. Now, however, he was convinced that his insistent habit of following her with his glance had had something to do with the death of the lovely girl. He looked on himself as her murderer; he felt a horror of himself and wished he had never been born.

This state of prostration was followed by a violent reaction. Paul broke into a nervous laugh, threw away Valetta's book, and exclaimed: —

"Upon my word, I am going crazy or turning into an idiot. The Naples sun must have affected my brain. What would the men at my club say if they knew that I have seriously discussed whether or not I am a jettatore?"

Paddy here knocked discreetly at the door. Paul opened, and the groom, conscientiously performing his

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duties, presented to him upon the shining leather of his cap, a letter from Alicia, excusing himself the while for not having a silver salver.

D'Aspremont broke the seal and read as follows: —

"Are you annoyed with me, Paul? You did not come last night, and your lemon sherbet melted sadly away on the table. I kept looking for you until nine o'clock, trying to make out the sound of your carriage wheels amid the din of the cicalas and the rumbling of the tambourines. Then I gave up hope and quarrelled with the Commodore. Are not women wonderfully just? Pulcinella's black nose, Don Limon, and Donna Pangrazia must have a wonderful attraction for you, for I know by my secret police that you spent the evening at San Carlino. You did not write a single one of those letters you said were so important. Why do you not simply confess that you were stupidly jealous of Count d'Altavilla? I thought you had more pride, and your modesty is touching. You need have no fear; Count d'Altavilla is too handsome, and I do not care for Apollos that wear watch charms. I ought to treat you with haughty disdain, and inform you that I did not notice your absence, but the truth is that the time

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hung very heavily on my hands, that I was in a very bad temper, very nervous, and that I nearly beat Vicè who was laughing as if she were crazy, though what it was at, I have not the faintest idea.

"A. W."

Paul completely recovered the feeling of real life on reading this playfully sarcastic letter. He dressed, ordered the carriage, and soon the incredulous Scazziga was cracking his whip at his horses that dashed at a gallop down the lava-paved street, through the crowd that is ever dense on the Santa Lucia quay.

"What is the matter with you, Scazziga?" asked Paul; "you will have a smash presently."

The coachman turned sharply round to reply, and Paul's angry glance fell full upon him. A stone he had not perceived forced up one of the fore wheels and the violence of the shock caused him to fall from his box, though he managed to keep hold of the reins. He clambered back as nimbly as a monkey, with a bump the size of a hen's egg on his forehead.

"The devil take me if I turn round again when you speak to me," he grumbled low. "Timberio, Falsacappa, and Gelsomina were right. He is a jettatore.

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To-morrow I shall buy a pair of horns; it can do no harm and may do good."

Paul was disturbed by the incident, for it brought him back within the magic circle he was trying to escape from. Of course the fact that a stone happens to be struck by the wheel of a carriage and that the driver tumbles off his seat, is of daily occurrence, but the *effect* had followed so closely upon the *cause*, Scazziga's fall had coincided so exactly with the *look* he had cast upon him, that all his fears returned.

"I have a great mind," he said to himself, "to leave this extravagant country to-morrow, for as long as I stay in it I feel my brain rattling around in my head like a dried nut in its shell. But if I were to acquaint Alicia with my fears, she would laugh at me, and the climate of Naples is beneficial to her. But, by the way, she was in excellent health before she made my acquaintance! Never had that swan's nest, England, floating on the waves, given birth to a fairer and rosier child. Life sparkled in her glorious eyes and bloomed upon her satiny fresh cheeks; a rich clean blood coursed in the azure veins under her transparent skin, and her beauty made itself felt under her grace and strength. But once my glance fell upon

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her, she grew pale, thin, and altered; her delicate hands became more slender; her brilliant eyes were circled with dark rings, and it seemed as though consumption had touched her with its bony fingers. During my absence, she quickly regained her lovely colour; her breath came freely from the lungs which the physician had sounded with anxiety. If she were freed from my fatal influence, she would live long. I believe I am killing her. The other evening, while I was there, she experienced such acute pain that her cheeks became pallid as though death had breathed upon her. I wonder whether I unknowingly cast jettatura upon her? Of course the whole thing may be explained in the most natural manner, for many English girls have a predisposition to consumption."

Paul d'Aspremont turned these thoughts over in his mind all the way. When he appeared on the terrace, where the Commodore and Alicia spent most of their time, the huge Sicilian ox-horns, given by Count d'Altavilla, outspread their jasper-like crescents in the most conspicuous place. The Commodore, observing Paul's glance fall upon them, turned blue, which was his way of blushing. Less delicately minded than his niece, he had listened to Vicè's confidences.

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Alicia, with a gesture of profound disdain, signed to the servant to remove the horns, and cast upon Paul an adorable glance full of love, of courage, and of faith.

"Leave them where they are," said Paul to Vicè. "They are very handsome."

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IX

PAUL'S remark upon the horns presented by Count d'Altavilla appeared to give the Commodore pleasure. Vicè smiled, exhibiting a row of teeth of which the canines, separate and sharp, shone with ferocious whiteness. Alicia's swift look asked of her friend a question that remained unanswered, and an awkward silence fell upon the company.

The first moments of a visit, even when it is cordial, familiar, and the repetition of a daily call, are usually embarrassing. During the time of absence, even though it be of a few hours' duration only, an invisible atmosphere has gathered about each one and bars confidence. It is like a perfectly clear pane of glass through which one can see the landscape but that a fly cannot traverse. There is apparently nothing the matter, yet an obstacle makes itself felt.

An unspoken thought, kept well in the background, for all three were well seasoned people of the world,

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caused each member of the party to be more preoccupied than was the wont of persons usually so much at their ease. The Commodore was mechanically twiddling his thumbs; d'Aspremont could not take his eyes off the black, polished points of the horns he had forbidden Vicè to remove, studying them as though he were a naturalist seeking to classify some hitherto unknown species; Alicia was toying with the bow of the broad ribbon that she wore as a belt round her wrapper, and pretended to be refastening it.

She was the first to break the ice, with the playful freedom of English girls, who are, however, so modest and reserved once they are married.

"Really, Paul, you have not been very amiable of late. Is your love a cold-house plant which can bloom in England only, and the development of which the high temperature of this climate interferes with? You were so attentive, so thoughtful, so ready to forestall my least wishes when you were with us at our Lincolnshire place. You presented yourself with smiling lips, your heart on your sleeve, your hair irreproachably curled, and ready to bend the knee before the goddess of your soul; such, in a word, as lovers are depicted in the illustrations to novels."

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"And I still love you, Alicia," replied d'Aspremont, in a voice full of feeling, but without removing his eyes from the horns hanging on one of the antique pillars that supported the vine-leaf roof.

"You say it in so lugubrious a tone," returned Alicia, "that it taxes my self-conceit to believe it. I fancy that what you liked in me was pallor, my diaphaneity, my Ossianic and vaporous grace. My state of ill-health bestowed upon me a certain romantic charm that I have now lost."

"You were never lovelier, Alicia."

"Words, words, words, as Shakespeare says. I am so lovely that you do not condescend to look at me."

As a matter of fact d'Aspremont's eyes had not once rested upon the girl.

"Well," she said, with a comically exaggerated sigh, "I see plainly that I have turned into a stout, sturdy peasant girl, blooming, high-coloured and blowzy, without a trace of breeding, and unfit to appear at Almack's or in the 'Book of Beauty,' with a sheet of tissue paper between my portrait and a sonnet."

"Miss Ward, you take pleasure in gratuitously slandering yourself," said Paul with downcast glance.

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"You had better own at once that you think me horrid. It is your fault, Commodore," she went on. "You have been feeding me up on chicken wings, choice chops, fillet of beef and Canary wine, and with your rides on horseback, your sea-bathing and your gymnastic exercise, you have worked me up to a state of rude country health that has scattered to the winds Mr. d'Aspremont's poetic illusions."

"You are teasing Mr. d'Aspremont and making fun of me," said the Commodore. "It is quite certain that fillet of beef is strengthening and that Canary wine never hurt any one."

"What a disappointment it must be for you, Paul, to have parted with a nixie, an elf, a willis, and to come upon what physicians and parents call a healthy lass! But since you have not the courage to look at me, shudder with horror — I am seven ounces heavier than when I left England!"

"Eight ounces," proudly corrected the Commodore, who tended Alicia as carefully as the most tender mother could have done.

"Is it eight ounces exactly? Oh, you dreadful uncle; you want to disenchant Mr. d'Aspremont for good."

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While the young girl was thus rallying him with a coquetry she would not have permitted herself to indulge in had she not had serious reasons for doing so, d'Aspremont, a prey to his fixed notion and resolved not to harm Miss Ward with his deadly glance, kept his eyes resolutely upon the talismanic horns or let his gaze wander over the vast blue horizon visible from the terrace. He asked himself whether he was not in duty bound, even at the cost of passing for a man false to his word and to the dictates of honour, to flee from Alicia and to spend the rest of his life on some desert island where at least his jettatura would die out for lack of a human glance that could absorb it.

"I see," continued Alicia, keeping up her raillery, "what is making you so sombre and so grave. Our wedding is only a month hence, and you are startled at the thought of becoming the husband of a poor country girl who has lost all trace of elegance. I willingly give you back your plighted word, and you may marry my friend Sarah Templeton, who eats pickles and drinks vinegar in order to get thin."

And she laughed with the silvery, bright laughter of youth at the notion, Paul and the Commodore joining in heartily.

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When the last burst of her nervous gaiety had spent itself, she went up to d'Aspremont, took him by the hand, led him to the piano placed in the corner of the terrace, and opening a music book on the desk, said: —

"My dear Paul, you evidently do not feel up to talking to-day, and what is not worth saying is sung. You shall therefore take your part in this duettino, the accompaniment of which is not difficult; it consists chiefly of chords."

Paul sat down on the stool; Alicia stood behind him in such a way as to read the song upon the score. The Commodore leaned back, stretched out his legs, and assumed a pose of anticipated beatitude, for he claimed to be somewhat of a dilettante and affirmed that he adored music. After the sixth bar, however, he slept the sleep of the just, and insisted, in spite of his niece's sarcasms, in giving the name of ecstasy to his dozing, although he not infrequently snored, which is not a usual sign of ecstasy.

The duettino was a bright and lively air set to words by Metastasio, and in the taste of Cimarosa, which I can best liken to a butterfly flitting to and fro in a sunbeam.

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Music hath power to cause the evil spirits to depart. Paul had not been playing long before he had forgotten everything about conjuring fingers, magical horns, and coral amulets. He had forgotten Valetta's terrible work and all he had read about jettatura. His soul was rising joyously, borne on the accents of Alicia's voice, into a pure and harmonious atmosphere. The cicalas were silent, as if listening, and the sea breeze, that had just risen, bore the notes away with the petals of the flowers that fell from the vases on the edge of the terrace.

"Uncle is as sound asleep as the Seven Sleepers in their grotto, and if it were not his habit, it might be painful to our self-love as artists. Shall we take a turn round the garden while he is resting? I have never yet shown you my Paradise."

So saying, Alicia took down from a nail driven into one of the pillars, on which it was hung by the long ribbons, a broad-brimmed Florentine straw hat.

In matters of horticulture Alicia held the most eccentric opinions; she would not allow flowers to be picked or the shrubbery to be trimmed. It was, as I have said, the wild, uncultivated appearance of the garden that had attracted her. So the two young

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people had to make a way for themselves through the dense bushes that immediately closed in behind them. Alicia went first and laughed to see the branches of the rose laurels which she displaced lash Paul's face, but hardly had she gone twenty steps when, as if to play a botanical practical joke, a green bough caught and lifted her hat so high that Paul was unable to recover it. Fortunately the foliage was thick and the sun cast scarce a few golden sequins upon the sand through the interstices of the branches.

"This is my favourite retreat," said Alicia, showing Paul a picturesquely broken rock protected by a dense growth of orange trees, lime trees, lentisks, and myrtles.

She sat down on a part of the rock cut to the shape of a seat, and signed to Paul to kneel down in front of her upon the dry moss that carpeted the foot of the rock.

"Put both your hands in mine, and look straight into my eyes," she said. "In another month I shall be your wife. Why does your glance avoid mine?"

Paul, indeed, again a prey to his thoughts of jettatura, had looked away.

"Are you afraid of reading in it any rebellious or guilty thought? You know my heart has been yours since the day you brought the letter of introduction to

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my uncle in our drawing-room at Richmond. I am one of those Englishwomen who are tender, romantic, and proud, and who love in a moment with a lifelong love, a love more than lifelong, it may be, and she who can love can die too. Look straight into my eyes; I insist upon it; do not try to look down, or I shall be compelled to believe that a gentleman who ought to fear God alone allows himself to be frightened by wretched superstitions. Fix on me your eyes, which you fancy so dangerous and which are so sweet to me, for I read your love in them. Then tell me if you still think me pretty enough to drive with me, when we are married, in an open carriage in Hyde Park."

Paul, bewildered, looked long at Alicia with a glance filled with love and enthusiasm. Suddenly the girl turned deadly pale; a sharp pain shot through her heart like an arrow; something seemed to give way in her breast, and she put her handkerchief quickly to her lips. A red drop stained the fine cambric, which Alicia swiftly concealed.

"I thank you, Paul. You have made me very happy, for I believed you had ceased to love me."

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X

ALICIA'S gesture, as she strove to hide her handkerchief, had not, quick as it had been, escaped d'Aspremont's notice. He turned pale in his turn, for this was an unmistakable proof of his fatal power. His brain was filled with the most sinister thoughts, and for a second suicide occurred to him. Was it not, indeed, his duty to destroy himself as being a maleficent creature, and thus to remove the involuntary cause of so many misfortunes? He would willingly have endured the hardest trials and borne courageously the burden of life, but the thought of dealing death to the woman he loved best was horrible beyond expression.

The heroic girl had mastered the feeling of pain, the consequence of Paul's glance, and which coincided so strangely with the warning given her by Count d'Altavilla. A less strong-minded person might have been struck by the result, which, if not supernatural, was at least difficult of explanation; but, as I have said, Alicia was religious and not superstitious. Her faith,

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unshakable in matters of belief, rejected as old women's tales every story of mysterious influences, and she laughed at the most deeply rooted popular beliefs. Besides, even had she admitted the existence of jettatura, and had she recognised in Paul its evident signs, she was too tender-hearted and too proud to hesitate for a moment. Paul had done nothing to which the most delicate susceptibility could take exception, and Miss Ward would rather have fallen dead under his so-called fatal glance than have rejected a love she had accepted with her uncle's consent and which marriage was soon to crown. She resembled somewhat the chastely bold, virginly resolute heroines of Shakespeare, whose sudden love is none the less pure and true, and who unhesitatingly bind themselves for life. Her hand had pressed Paul's and no other man on earth was henceforth to hold it in his. She looked upon her life as linked to his, and her maidenly modesty would have revolted at the mere thought of any other hymen.

She therefore exhibited genuine happiness, or at least so admirably simulated it that the keenest observer would have been deceived, and raising Paul, still kneeling at her feet, she led him through the flower-tangled

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and shrub-obstructed walks of her wild garden to a spot where the vegetation, less dense, allowed the sea to show like an azure dream of the infinite. The luminous serenity dispelled Paul's dark thoughts. Alicia leaned upon his arm as if they were already man and wife, and in this mute and pure caress, meaningless in any other woman but decisive in her case, she gave herself to him more formally still, reassured him, and gave him to understand how little she feared the dangers with which she was said to be threatened. Although she had at once imposed silence on Vicè, and then on her uncle, and although Count d'Altavilla had refused to name any one, she had quickly understood that it was Paul d'Aspremont who was meant, for the mysterious remarks plainly pointed to him. She had also noticed that Paul himself, sharing the prejudice so widespread in Naples that turns into a jettatore any man whose face is somewhat out of the common, had come, through incredible weakness on his part, to believe himself a victim of the fascino, and that he deliberately avoided looking at her in order not to hurt her by his glance. It was in order to react against this incipient mania that she had brought about the scene I have just described, but which had a result very differ-

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ent from that she had intended, since it confirmed, even more than before, Paul's sad conviction.

They returned to the terrace, where the Commodore, still under the influence of the music, was melodiously sleeping in his rattan arm-chair. Paul took leave, and Alicia, imitating the Neapolitan gesture of farewell, blew a kiss to him on her finger tips, and said, in a voice full of suave caresses, "Good-bye till to-morrow, Paul. You will be sure to come, will you not?"

The Commodore, aroused by Paul's departure, was struck by Alicia's radiant, alarming, almost supernatural beauty. The whites of her eyes had a burnished silver tone in which flashed her pupils like luminous black stars; her cheeks were ideally rosy, and of a purity and warmth no painter ever knew; her temples, transparent as agates, were veined with a network of delicate blue lines, while her flesh seemed to be interpenetrated by sunbeams, so that her soul appeared to be breaking out of her.

"How beautiful you are to-day, Alicia," said the Commodore.

"You flatter me, uncle. It is not your fault if I am not the most conceited girl in the United King-

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dom. Happily I do not believe flatterers, even when disinterested."

"Beautiful, dangerously beautiful," went on the Commodore, speaking to himself. "She is the living image of her poor mother, Nancy, who died at nineteen. Angels like them cannot remain on earth. A mere breath blows them away, and invisible wings seem to grow on their shoulders. They are too fair, too pure, too perfect; they lack the red, coarse blood of life, and God, who lends them to this earth for a few days, hastens to recall them to Himself. Her supreme brilliancy of beauty saddens me as though it were a farewell."

"Well, uncle," said Miss Ward, who noted the darkening of her uncle's brow; "if I am so pretty, it is time I were married. The veil and orange wreath will become me."

"Marry! Are you in such a hurry to leave your old uncle?"

"I shall not leave you, for it is agreed with Mr. d'Aspremont that we are to live all together. You know very well that I cannot do without you."

"Mr. d'Aspremont is all very well, but he is not your husband yet."

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"Your word and mine are both pledged to him, and you have never broken yours."

"He has my pledged word, there is no doubt of that," replied the Commodore, somewhat embarrassed.

"And is it not some days since the six months' delay you wished for came to an end?" said Alicia, whose rosy cheeks became rosier yet.

"So you have been counting the months, my girl. Well, there is no trusting you demure ones."

"I love Mr. d'Aspremont," replied Alicia, gravely.

"There's the rub," jerked out Sir Joshua Ward, who, filled with the notions put into his head by Vicè and Count d'Altavilla, did not at all care to have a jettatore for a son-in-law.

"I have but one heart," returned Alicia, "and but one love, even if, like my mother, I were to die at nineteen."

"Die!" exclaimed the Commodore; "pray do not utter such a horrible thing."

"Have you anything to urge against Mr. d'Aspremont?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Has he shown himself dishonourable in any way? Has he once proved cowardly, vile, untruthful, or

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perfidious? Has he ever insulted a woman or backed down before a man? Is there any secret stain upon his crest? Would a girl, entering society as his wife, have to blush for him or cast her eyes down?"

"Mr. Paul d'Aspremont is a perfect gentleman, and absolutely respectable."

"You may be sure, uncle, that, if he were not, I should at once give him up, and bury myself in some inaccessible retreat; but I shall not break my plighted word for any other reason. You understand me?" said Miss Ward, gently but firmly.

The Commodore was twiddling his thumbs, his usual recourse when bothered.

"Why are you so cool towards Paul nowadays?" went on Miss Ward. "You used to be so fond of him; you could not do without him when we were in Lincolnshire; and when you shook hands with him, and crushed his fingers in doing so, you said he was a fine fellow, to whom you would not hesitate to confide a girl's happiness."

"Yes, indeed, I was very fond of him," said the Commodore, moved by the remembrances called up by his niece. "But what is not so plain when shrouded

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in English fogs, is plain enough in the Neapolitan sunshine."

"What do you mean?" asked Alicia, whose bright colour suddenly faded away and who turned as white as an alabaster statue upon a tombstone, while her voice trembled.

"I mean that Paul is a jettatore."

"What, uncle! you, Sir Joshua Ward, a Christian gentleman and a subject of Her Majesty; you, a retired naval officer, and an enlightened and civilised man, so often consulted on so many matters; you who have education and wisdom, and who daily read your Bible, you do not hesitate to accuse Paul of jettatura? Oh! I did not expect that from you."

"I may be all you say, my dear Alicia," replied the Commodore, "when your happiness is not at stake, but when a danger, even if imaginary only, threatens you, I become more superstitious than a peasant of the Abruzzi, a lazzaroni on the Mole, a Chiaja ostricajo, a maid servant of Terra di Lavoro, or even a Neapolitan Count. Paul may glare at me as much as he likes with his cross look; I shall remain as cool as in front of a rapier point or a pistol barrel. Fascino can have no hold on me, who have been burned, tanned,

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and baked by every sun. It is only where you are concerned, my dear, that I am credulous, and I confess that I feel a cold sweat all over me when that unfortunate fellow's glance rests upon you. I know very well that he has no evil intentions and that he loves you better than his own life, but it seems to me that when he does look at you your features change, your colour goes, and you strive to hide keen pain. Then I do feel like tearing out his eyes with the Count's horns."

"Poor dear uncle," said Alicia, moved by the Commodore's warmth. "Our lives are in God's hands. Not a prince dies on his state bed, not a sparrow under the slates, unless the appointed time has come. Fascino has nothing to do with it, and it is wicked to suppose that a more or less oblique glance can have any influence upon our fate. Come, nunky," continued she, using the term of familiar endearment of the jester in "King Lear," "you were not serious in what you said just now. Your love for me biassed your judgment, usually so sound. I am sure you would never dare to say to Paul that you cannot now give him your niece's hand and that you do not want him to marry into your family because he is a jettatore."

"By Joshua, my namesake, who stopped the sun, I

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shall not hesitate to speak my mind to your handsome Paul," cried the Commodore. "What do I care whether I am ridiculous and absurd, or whether I break my word even, when it is a question of your health? I pledged my word to a man, not to a jettatore. I have promised, it is true, and I shall simply not keep my promise. If he is not satisfied, I am ready to give him satisfaction."

And the exasperated Commodore lunged out without thinking of the gout that tortured him.

"Sir Joshua Ward, you will not do so," said Alicia, with calm dignity.

The Commodore fell back in his arm-chair quite out of breath, and remained silent.

"Granting that the shameful and stupid charge were true, uncle, is it a reason for dismissing Mr. d'Aspremont and turning his misfortune into a crime? You acknowledge yourself that the harm he may do is done unconsciously, and that no man was ever more loving, generous, and noble."

"One does not marry a vampire, however good his intentions may be," replied the Commodore.

"But that is all nonsense and extravagant superstition. The one bit of truth in the whole business is

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that Paul has taken it seriously, and is terrified and under the spell of a hallucination. He has come to believe in his fatal power, is afraid of himself, for every slight accident, unnoticed by him formerly, confirms his belief, for he now fancies it is caused by him. Is it not my part, since I am his wife before God and soon shall be so before men, with your blessing, uncle dear, is it not my part, I say, to calm his over excited imagination, to drive away these vain shadows, to dispel, by apparent and real trustfulness, his haggard anxiety, twin sister of monomania, and to save, by making him happy, his troubled soul and his imperilled mind?"

"You are right, as usual, Alicia," answered the Commodore, "and I am only an old fool. I do believe Vicè is a witch, who has upset me with her stories. As for Count d'Altavilla, he strikes me at present, with his horns and his cabalistic gimcracks, as being very ridiculous. No doubt it was a trick to get Paul out of the way so that he might get you himself."

"It is possible that Count d'Altavilla has acted in good faith," said Miss Ward, smiling. "But now you were of his opinion."

"Do not hit a man when he is down, my dear. Besides I might fall away again, for I have not quite

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got rid of my erroneous ideas. The best thing we can do is to leave Naples by the next steamer, and go quietly back to England. When Paul ceases to see around him bulls' horns, stags' heads, pointed fingers, coral amulets, and all the rest of these diabolical inventions, he will grow calmer, and I also shall forget the nonsense which nearly led me to break my word and to act as no gentleman should act. You shall marry Paul, since you have agreed to do so; you shall keep for me the sitting-room and bedroom on the ground-floor of our Richmond home, and the octagonal tower in our Lincolnshire castle, and we shall live happily together. If your health requires that you should go to a milder climate, we shall rent a country house near Tours, or else at Cannes, where Lord Brougham has a fine property, and where these damnable jettatura superstitions are unknown, thank God! What say you to that, Alicia?"

"You do not need my approval; am I not the most obedient of nieces?"

"Yes, when you have your own way, you minx," said the Commodore with a smile as he retired to his own room.

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Alicia remained a few moments longer on the terrace, but, whether the scene she had gone through had induced feverishness in her, or whether Paul really exercised over the young girl an influence such as the Commodore dreaded, she shivered with cold as the warm evening breeze blew upon her gauze-covered shoulders, and that night, feeling unwell, she begged Vicè to spread over her feet, cold and white as marble, one of those Harlequin rugs that are manufactured in Venice.

Meanwhile the glow-worms sparkled in the grass, the cicalas were chirping, and the great golden moon rose in the heavens out of a haze of heat.

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XI

THE next day, Alicia, who had had a bad night, scarcely touched the drink brought her by Vicè as was her daily habit, and she placed it languidly upon the table at her bedhead. She did not suffer from any pain in particular; it was rather that she felt worn out, that she found it difficult to live; and she would have experienced some difficulty in stating the symptoms of her trouble to a physician.

She ordered Vicè to bring her a mirror, for girls are more concerned with the change in their looks due to suffering than with suffering itself. She was extremely pale; two little spots only, like two rose leaves fallen upon a cup of milk, showed on her pallid cheeks. Her eyes shone with unaccustomed brilliancy, filled with the last flashes of fever, but her cherry lips had paled and, in order to restore their brightness, she bit them with her pearly teeth.

She rose, put on a white cashmere wrapper, twisted a gauze scarf around her head, for, in spite of the heat

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that kept the cicalas chirping, she felt shivery, and went out on the terrace at her accustomed time in order to avoid awaking the ever watchful solicitude of the Commodore. She barely tasted her breakfast, though she forced herself to do so, as the least symptom of illness would have been attributed by the Commodore to Paul's influence, and this Alicia desired above all things to avoid. Then, under pretext that the blinding light of day tired her, she withdrew to her room, after having several times repeated to her uncle, who was very suspicious in such matters, that she was particularly well that morning.

"Particularly well," said the Commodore to himself when she had gone; "I am not so sure of that. She had pearly tones round the eyes and a bright colour on her cheeks, exactly like her poor mother, who also used to insist that she had never felt better. What had I best do? If I were to make her break off her engagement to Paul, I should be merely killing her in another way. Best leave Nature to herself; Alicia is young yet. True, but it is the young that old Mob attacks; it is as jealous as a woman. I might send for a physician; but what can medicine do for an angel? Yet all the bad symptoms had disappeared. Ah! if it be

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indeed you, you cursed Paul, whose breath is withering that heavenly flower, I will strangle you with my own hands. But Nancy did not suffer from a jettatore's glance, and yet she died. Suppose Alicia were to die! No, no; it is impossible. What have I done that God should inflict such pain upon me? Long ere she dies I shall be under the sod, in the shadow of the church in my native place, with *Sacred to the Memory of Sir Joshua Ward* upon my tombstone. And Alicia will come and weep upon the gray stone over the old Commodore. I do not know what is the matter with me this morning; I am as low-spirited and dull as it is possible to be."

By way of dispelling these dark thoughts, the Commodore added a little Jamaica rum to his cup of tea, now grown cold, and called for his hookah, an innocent indulgence he allowed himself only when Alicia was absent, for her sensitiveness might have suffered even from that light-scented smoke.

He had already got the perfumed water bubbling and had puffed a few bluish wreaths of smoke, when Vicè appeared and announced Count d'Altavilla.

"Sir Joshua," said the Count, after the exchange of the ordinary civilities, "have you thought over the

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request I had the honour of making of you the other day?"

"I have thought it over," replied the Commodore, "but, as you are aware, I am pledged to Mr. Paul d'Aspremont."

"I am aware of the fact. Yet there are cases in which a pledge may be withdrawn. For instance, when the person to whom it has been made turns out to be different from what he was believed to be."

"Speak more plainly, Count."

"I dislike speaking ill of a rival, but after the conversation we had, you cannot help understanding me. If you were to refuse Mr. Paul d'Aspremont's suit, would you allow me to come forward?"

"For my own part I can answer in the affirmative, but it is not quite as sure that Miss Ward would approve of the change. She is very much in love with Paul, and it is somewhat my fault, for I favoured his suit myself before hearing all this nonsense. Pray forgive me, Count, for putting it in that way, but I am all upset."

"Do you want your niece to die?" said Count d'Altavilla, in a tone of deep emotion.

"Blood and thunder! My niece die!" exclaimed

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the Commodore, springing from his arm-chair and dropping the morocco tube of his hookah, for he was very sensitive on this point. "Is she dangerously ill?"

"Do not be so easily alarmed, sir. Miss Ward may live a long time yet."

"I am glad to hear that; you terrified me."

"On one condition, however," continued Count d'Altavilla, — "that she shall cease to see Mr. Paul d'Aspremont."

"The jettatura again! Unfortunately, Miss Ward does not believe in it."

"Listen to me," said the Count quietly. "The first time I met Miss Alicia at the Prince of Syracuse's ball, and began to love her with a love as respectful as it was deep, I was struck at once by the brilliant health, the joy of life, and the bloom of strength which radiated from her. Her beauty was positively luminous and seemed to float in an atmosphere of well-being. She shone in that phosphorescence like a star; Englishwomen, Russians, and Italians paled by her side. I could look at no one but her. To her English high-breeding she united the clean, strong grace of the goddesses of antiquity. Forgive my indulging in mythology, but I am descended from one of the Greek colonies."

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"She was indeed splendid. Miss Edwina O'Hara, Lady Eleanor Lilly, Mrs. Jane Strangford, and Princess Vera Federeovna Bariatinski turned yellow with envy," returned the delighted Commodore.

"And now do you not notice that her beauty has become somewhat languid, that her features have acquired a morbid delicacy, that the veins on her hands show bluer than they should, and that the sound of her voice has a troubled vibration and a painful charm? The earthly in her is vanishing and making way for the angelic. She is attaining an ethereal perfection that, at the cost of your thinking me too materialistic, I must own I do not care to see in the daughters of our earth."

The Count's words corresponded so accurately with the secret preoccupation of Sir Joshua Ward that the latter remained for some moments silent and apparently sunk in deep thought.

"I have not yet done," went on the Count. "Had Miss Ward's health caused you any anxiety previous to the arrival of Mr. d'Aspremont in England?"

"Never once. She was the brightest and most blooming girl in the kingdom."

"You see, then, that Mr. d'Aspremont's presence

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coincides with the periods of ill-health that are undermining Miss Ward's life. I do not ask you, a Northerner, to credit implicitly a belief, a prejudice, a superstition, if you please, that prevails throughout our Southern lands, but you must confess that the facts are startling and deserve attention."

"May there not be a natural cause in her case?" said the Commodore, shaken by the Count's specious reasoning, but held back by his English conservatism from adopting the popular belief.

"Miss Ward is not ill; she is poisoned, as it were, by Mr. d'Aspremont's glance. If he is not a jettatore, he is at the least maleficent."

"But what can I do? She is in love with him, laughs at jettatura, and pretends that one cannot refuse an honourable man for such a reason."

"I have no right to interfere on behalf of your niece. I am neither her brother, her relative, nor her betrothed; but if I could get your consent, there is one thing I might try in order to withdraw her from that fatal influence. Do not be afraid; I shall not commit any extravagance. Young though I am, I am well aware that a woman must not be talked about. Permit me only not to reveal my plan to you and

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believe me when I say that it does not involve anything that the most punctiliously honourable man might not confess openly."

"You are very much in love with my niece, are you not?" said the Commodore.

"I am, and my love is hopeless. But do you grant me leave to act?"

"You are a terrible fellow, Count d'Altavilla. Well, try to save Alicia in your own way; not only do I not object, I approve."

The Count rose, bowed, got into his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to the Hôtel de Rome.

Paul was leaning on the table, his head in his hands, plunged in the most painful reflections. He had caught sight of the two or three drops of blood on Alicia's handkerchief, and still under the spell of his conviction, he blamed himself for his deadly love and reproached himself for accepting the devotion of the lovely girl who was ready to die for him; and he was wondering what superhuman sacrifice he could accomplish that would repay such sublime unselfishness.

His groom Paddy interrupted his meditations as he brought in Count d'Altavilla's card.

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"Count d'Altavilla! What can he possibly want with me?" said Paul, greatly surprised. "Show him in."

When the Neapolitan gentleman appeared at the door, d'Aspremont had already masked his astonishment with the look of cold indifference under which men of the world conceal their feelings.

"Sir," began the Count, while toying with the charms on his watch chain, "what I am about to say to you is so strange, so improper, so out of place, that you would be justified in throwing me out of the window. Spare yourself so brutal a proceeding, for I am ready to give you satisfaction as a gentleman."

"I am listening, sir; reserving to myself the right of availing myself of your offer later, in the event of your remarks proving unpleasant to me," replied Paul, steadfastly.

"You are a jettatore."

At these words d'Aspremont's face suddenly turned ashy green, and a red ring formed around his eyes; he bent his brows, the wrinkle in his forehead deepened, and a sulphurous light flashed from his eyes. He half rose, scoring with his nails the mahogany arms of his chair. It was so terrible that d'Alta-

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villa, brave though he was, seized one of the tiny forked branches of coral hanging on his watch chain, and instinctively directed the points of it towards Paul.

By a supreme effort of the will, d'Aspremont sat down again and said: —

"You were right, sir; I ought to throw you out of the window for your insult, but I shall have the patience to await another form of reparation."

"Believe me," went on the Count, "when I say that I should not offer such an insult, which blood alone can wash out, to a gentleman were I not impelled to it by the gravest of motives."

"What is that to me?"

"It matters little to you, as you say, for you are fortunate in your love, but I, Don Felipe d'Altavilla, I forbid you to see Miss Alicia Ward again."

"I take no orders from you."

"I know that," answered the Neapolitan Count, "and I do not, therefore, expect that you will obey me."

"Then what is your reason for acting as you are doing?"

"I am convinced that the fascination with which

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you are unfortunately endowed acts fatally upon Miss Alicia Ward. It is an absurd notion, a prejudice worthy of the Middle Ages, which no doubt strikes you as profoundly ridiculous. I do not propose to discuss that side of the question with you. Your eyes when turned upon Miss Ward cast upon her, in spite of yourself, a fatal glance which will be her death. I have no other means of preventing that sad result than picking an apparently causeless quarrel with you. In the sixteenth century I should have had you killed by one of my highland peasants, but that sort of thing is not good form nowadays. I did think of begging you to return to France, but it was too absurd. You would have laughed at a rival, who, under pretext of jettatura, requested you to depart and to leave him alone with your future bride."

While the Count was speaking, Paul d'Aspremont felt himself a prey to a secret horror. He, a Christian, was then really the plaything of the powers of Hell, and the Evil One in person looked out of his eyes! Catastrophes followed in his train, and his love was deadly! For a moment his reason tottered on its throne, and madness fluttered in his brain.

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"On your honour, Count, do you believe what you have just said to me?" he exclaimed after a few minutes' reflection during which the Neapolitan spoke no word.

"On my honour, I do believe it."

"Then it is true," murmured Paul, "and I am a murderer, a fiend, a vampire. I am killing that heavenly girl and driving that old man to despair."

He was on the point of promising the Count not again to see Alicia, but human respect and jealousy awaking in his heart kept back the words he was about to utter.

"I will not conceal from you, Count, that I am even now going to call on Miss Ward."

"I shall not take you by the scruff of the neck to prevent your doing so. You refrained from assaulting me a moment since, and I am grateful to you for that, but I shall be delighted to see you to-morrow, at six o'clock, in the ruins of Pompeii, let us say in the Thermæ; it is a very suitable spot. What weapons do you prefer? You have the choice, as it is I who have insulted you. Shall it be rapiers, swords, or pistols?"

"We shall fight with knives, blindfolded, and sepa-

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rated by the length of a handkerchief of which we shall each hold one end. We must even up the chances; I am a jettatore, and I should only have to look at you to kill you, Count."

And Paul laughed stridently, threw open a door, and disappeared.

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XII

ALICIA had settled herself in a low room in the house, the walls of which were decorated with the landscapes in fresco, that, in Italy, take the place of wall-papers. The floor was covered with Manila matting. A table, on which was thrown a Turkish cloth, whereon lay volumes of verse, Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow, a mirror in an antique frame, and a few cane chairs formed the furniture. Blinds of China reeds, adorned with pagodas, rocks, willows, storks, and dragons, fitted to the openings and half drawn up, allowed a soft light to filter in. The branch of an orange tree, laden with flowers that the swelling fruit caused to fall, entered the room familiarly and spread like a garland above Alicia's head, scattering upon her its perfumed blooms.

The young girl, somewhat unwell, was lying upon a narrow sofa by the window, supported by two or three morocco cushions and her feet wrapped up in the Venetian rug. The book she had been reading had

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slipped from her hands; her eyes, under their long lashes, had a far-away look and seemed to be gazing into the world beyond. She was experiencing that almost voluptuous weariness that follows upon an attack of fever, and she was busy chewing the orange blossoms she picked up on her coverlet and of which she enjoyed the bitter savour. Schiavone has painted a Venus chewing roses, and a modern artist might have made a companion piece to the old Venetian master's painting by representing Alicia biting away at the orange blossoms.

She was thinking of Paul d'Aspremont, and wondering whether she would really live long enough to become his wife; not that she believed in the influence of jettatura, but that she was, in spite of herself, a prey to the gloomiest presentiments. That very night she had had a dream the impression of which had not been dispelled by her waking.

In that dream she had seen herself lying down, but awake, and looking at the door of the room with the feeling that *some one* was about to enter. After a few moments of anxious waiting, she had perceived against the dark background of the door a slender white form, which, transparent at first, and allowing the various

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objects to be seen through it as through a faint mist, had acquired greater consistency as it approached her.

The shade wore a muslin dress the long folds of which dragged on the ground; long black curls, half undone, hung mournfully down either side of her face, on the cheek-bones of which showed two bright red spots. The bosom and neck were so white that they could scarcely be distinguished from the dress, and it was impossible to say where the skin ended and where the stuff began. A very fine Venetian necklace circled the slender neck with its golden line, and in the delicate, blue-veined hand she held a tea-rose, the petals of which were falling to the ground like tears.

Alicia had never known her mother, who had died a year after giving birth to her, but she often gazed long at a faded miniature, the ivory tone and the almost vanished colouring of which, wan as the resemblance of the dead, made one think of the portrait of a shadow rather than of that of a living woman, and she understood that the woman who had entered the room was her mother, Nancy Ward. The white dress, the Venetian necklace, the flower in the hand, the black hair, the cheeks with their red spots, — nothing was lacking.

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It was indeed the original of the miniature, taller and larger, moving in the reality of a dream.

Love and terror made Alicia's heart beat fast. She tried to hold her arms out to the shade, but they were heavy as lead and she could not raise them from the couch on which she lay. She strove to speak, but could only utter confused sounds.

Nancy, having placed the tea-rose upon the table, knelt by the bed and laid her cheek against Alicia's breast, listening to the working of the lungs and noting the beating of the heart. The shade's cold cheek felt like ice to the young girl, terrified by the silent auscultation.

The apparition rose, cast a sorrowful glance upon the maiden, and counting the petals of the rose, some of which had fallen since she had placed it on the table, said, "There is but one left." Then sleep had interposed its dark gauze between the sleeper and the shade, and night had swallowed up everything.

Had her mother's soul come to warn her and to fetch her? What was the meaning of the mysterious words that had dropped from the shadowy lips,— "There is but one left"? Was the fading rose with

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the falling petals a symbol of her own life? The strange dream, with its graceful terrors and its awesome charm, the lovely spectre draped in muslin and counting the petals of the flower had taken fast hold of the girl's imagination. A shadow of melancholy brooded upon her lovely brow, and the sombre wings of dread presentiments swept across her face.

Had not the orange branch that shook its blooms down upon her also a funereal meaning? Were the little virginal stars not to open under her bridal veil? Sorrowful and preoccupied, Alicia withdrew from her lips the bloom she was biting; the bloom was already yellowed and faded!

It was nearly the hour when Paul d'Aspremont would call. Alicia pulled herself together, smoothed her face, curled her ringlets, arranged the folds of her somewhat rumpled gauze scarf, and picked up her book to give herself the air of being occupied.

Paul entered and Miss Ward welcomed him with a playful glance, for she did not wish him to feel any alarm at seeing her lying down, as he would infallibly have believed himself to have caused her illness. The scene with Count d'Altavilla had left on Paul's face a look of irritation and fierceness

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which led Vicè to make the sign of protection, but Alicia's loving smile speedily dispelled the cloud on her lover's face.

"You are not seriously ill, I trust," he said as he sat down by her.

"It is nothing; I am a little over tired; the African sirocco that was blowing yesterday wore me out, but you shall see how well I shall be when we get back to Lincolnshire. Now that I am strong again, we shall take turns in rowing upon the lake."

But even as she spoke, she could not keep back a fit of coughing. D'Aspremont turned pale and looked away, and for a few moments silence reigned in the room.

"I have never given you anything, Paul," went on Alicia, removing from her wasted finger a plain gold ring. "Take this ring and wear it in remembrance of me. I dare say it will go on your finger, for your hand is almost as small as a woman's. And now, good-bye; I feel tired and I should like to try to sleep. Be sure to come to see me to-morrow."

Paul went away broken-hearted. Alicia had in vain tried to conceal her sufferings; he loved her madly, and he was killing her. The very ring she had just given

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him, was it not the symbol of their betrothal in another life?

He wandered along the beach, nearly out of his senses, planning flight, bethinking himself of entering a Trappist monastery and awaiting death seated on a coffin without ever raising the cowl of his frock. He called himself a coward and an ingrate for not having the strength to sacrifice his love, and taking a mean advantage of Alicia's love; for it was plain that she knew everything, that he was a jettatore, as Count d'Altavilla had said; yet, full of angelic pity, she would not repel him.

"Yes," he said to himself, "that handsome Neapolitan, that Count whom she disdains, is really in love. His love shames mine, since, in order to save Alicia, he did not fear to attack and challenge me, a jettatore, that is, as he sees it, a being as much to be dreaded as the fiend himself. While he spoke to me, he was toying with his amulets, and the glance of that famous duellist who has slain three men fell before mine."

On his return to the Hôtel de Rome, Paul wrote a few letters, drew up a will in which he left all he possessed, save a legacy to Paddy, to Miss Ward, and

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took the various precautions which a gentleman takes when about to engage in a duel to the death.

He opened the rose-wood cases in which he kept his weapons in compartments lined with green serge, turned over the rapiers, the pistols, and the hunting-knives, and at last came upon a couple of Corsican stilettoes, absolutely identical, which he had purchased with the intention of giving them to his friends. The blades were of pure steel, stout near the hilt, and double edged towards the point, damascened, curiously terrible, and carefully mounted. He also selected three silk handkerchiefs and made a bundle of the lot. Then he sent word to Scazziga to be ready very early in the morning for an excursion into the country.

"May the duel prove fatal to me," said he as he threw himself on the bed. "If I am only lucky enough to be killed, Alicia will live."

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XIII

POMPEII, the dead city, does not awake in the morning like living cities, and although it has partially thrown back the covering of ashes that has lain over it for so many centuries, it remains asleep on its funereal couch even when the night has passed away.

At that time the tourists of all nations who visit it during the day are still in their beds, worn out by their fatiguing excursions, and dawn, as it lights up the ruins of the mummy-city, does not behold a single human face. The lizards alone, with quivering tails, crawl along the walls, skurry across the disjointed mosaics, heedless of the *Cave canem* inscribed on the threshold of the deserted houses, and joyously hail the first beams of the rising sun. They are the dwellers who have taken the places of the former inhabitants, and it seems as though Pompeii had been exhumed for their special benefit.

Strange indeed is it to see in the rose and azure light of morn the dead city that was surprised in the

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midst of its pleasures, of its work and its civilisation, and which has not undergone the slow decay of ordinary ruins. One cannot help thinking that the owners of the houses, preserved in their smallest parts, are about to issue forth clad in their Roman or Greek dresses; that the cars will presently be tearing along the ruts in the pavement made by them of old; that the topers will in a moment enter the taverns on the counters of which the stains made by the drinking cups are still visible. One walks as in a dream amid the scenes of the past; on the street corners may be seen the red letter posters advertising the shows of the day — only, the day has passed away more than seventeen centuries ago. In the early light of morn, the dancing girls painted on the walls seem to be clinking their crotalæ, and with the tip of their white feet to raise the rosy, foam-like edge of their draperies, believing no doubt that the lamps are being relighted for the orgies in the triclinium. The Venuses and the satyrs, heroic or grotesque figures, animated by a sunbeam, attempt to take the place of the vanished inhabitants and to provide the dead city with a painted population. The coloured shadows tremble along the walls, and the mind may, for a

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few minutes, indulge in the fancy of an evocation of antiquity.

On that day, however, to the great dismay of the lizards, the matutinal serenity of Pompeii was broken by a strange visitor. A carriage drew up at the entrance to the Street of Tombs; Paul alighted, and walked on foot to the meeting-place.

He was early, and though he must have been thinking of anything but archæology, he could not help noticing, as he went along, innumerable little details he probably would not have observed had he been in his usual frame of mind. When the brain relaxes its vigilance over the senses, these, acting for themselves, acquire occasionally singular lucidity. A man condemned to death and on his way to the scaffold, will mark a little flower blooming between the cracks of the pavement, the number on the button of a soldier's uniform, a misspelt word on a sign, and many another trifling circumstance which becomes suddenly of enormous importance.

D'Aspremont passed by the Villa of Diomedes, Mamia's tomb, the funeral hemicycles, the antique gate of the city, the houses and the shops that line the Consular Way, almost without glancing at them,

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yet the coloured and brilliant images of these monuments reached his brain with wonderful clearness. He saw everything: the fluted pillars overlaid half-way up with red or yellow stucco, the fresco paintings, and the inscriptions traced on the walls. An advertisement of a house to rent had even engraved itself so deeply in his mind that he mechanically kept on repeating the Latin words without attaching any meaning to them.

Was it the thought of the approaching duel that thus absorbed Paul? By no means. He did not even dwell upon it; his mind was elsewhere — in the drawing-room at Richmond. He was presenting to the Commodore his letter of introduction, and Alicia was watching him. She had on a white dress and jasmine blossoms in her hair. How lovely, young, and strong she was then!

The old baths are at the end of the Consular Way, near the Street of Fortune, so that d'Aspremont had no difficulty in finding them. He entered the vaulted hall surrounded by a series of niches formed by terra-cotta Atlases, that upbear an architrave ornamented with foliage and figures of children. The marble overlaying, the mosaics, and the bronze tripods have dis-

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appeared. Of the former splendour nothing is left save the terra-cotta Atlases and the walls, bare as those of a tomb. A faint light, filtering through a little round window in which shows a disk of blue sky, shimmers on the broken slabs of the pavement.

Here it was that the women of Pompeii were wont to come, after the bath, to dry their lovely wet bodies, to dress their hair, to resume their tunics, and to smile at their own beauty in the burnished brass of the mirrors. A very different scene was about to take place there, and blood was about to flow on the ground formerly drenched with perfumes.

Presently Count d'Altavilla appeared, carrying a case of pistols in his hand and a couple of swords under his arm, for he had taken it for granted that d'Aspremont had not made his proposal seriously. He had merely looked upon it as a piece of Mephistophelian raillery, of infernal sarcasm.

"What do we want with those pistols and swords, Count?" said Paul when he perceived him. "Did we not agree upon another mode of fighting?"

"Certainly, but it occurred to me that you might change your mind. No one ever fought a duel in that way."

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"Even were we equally skilful, my position gives me too great an advantage over you," answered Paul, with a bitter smile. "I do not propose to avail myself of it. Here are stilettoes that I have brought with me. Examine them; they are absolutely alike. Here are handkerchiefs with which to blindfold ourselves; they are thick, as you see, and *my glance* cannot pierce through them."

Count d'Altavilla bowed in acquiescence.

"We have no seconds," went on Paul, "and one of us must not emerge alive from this vault. Let us, therefore, each write a note certifying that the fight was a fair one, and the victor shall place it on the breast of the dead."

"A good idea," replied the Count, with a smile, as he wrote a few lines on a leaf torn from Paul's pocket-book.

Paul did the same.

Then the two adversaries threw off their coats, blindfolded themselves, seized their stilettoes, and took hold each of one end of the handkerchief, the link between their respective hatreds.

"Are you ready?" asked d'Aspremont of Count d'Altavilla.

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"Yes," replied the Neapolitan, in a perfectly cool voice.

Don Felipe d'Altavilla was a man of tried courage, who feared nothing on earth save jettatura, and this duel in the dark, that would have caused any other man to tremble with terror, did not in the least trouble him. He was simply staking his life on the issue, and he was saved the unpleasantness of seeing his opponent glare at him with his yellow eyes.

The two combatants brandished their knives, and the handkerchief which linked them in the thick darkness drew taut. Paul and the Count had instinctively thrown themselves back, that being the only parry possible in so strange a duel, and their arms fell back after a useless stab in the empty air.

This obscure struggle, in which each one felt death without being able to see it approach, was horrible. Grim and silent the two adversaries retreated, twisted around, sprang aside, struck against each other at times, missing their stroke, or sending it too far. There was no sound but that of the trampling of their feet and the panting of their breasts. Once d'Altavilla felt the point of his stiletto strike something. He stopped, thinking he had slain his rival, and listened

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for the fall of the body; but it was the wall he had struck.

"By Jove!" he said, as he fell on guard again. "I made sure I had run you through."

"Do not speak," answered Paul; "your voice guides me."

And the duel went on as before.

Suddenly the two opponents felt the taut handkerchief fall. A stroke of Paul's stiletto had severed it.

"A truce," cried the Neapolitan. "We are loose; the handkerchief is cut."

"No matter; let us go on," replied Paul.

A dead silence fell upon the scene. Like loyal adversaries that they were, neither d'Aspremont nor the Count wished to take advantage of the knowledge of the other man's position gained by the exchange of words. They therefore took a few steps to disconcert each other, and then began to grope for each other in the darkness.

D'Aspremont stumbled on a stone. The slight sound told the Neapolitan, who was brandishing his knife in space the direction in which he must go. Bending low in order to spring with greater force, he

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leaped forward like a tiger and struck full upon d'Aspremont's stiletto.

Paul felt the point of his weapon, and felt it wet. He heard staggering steps upon the pavement; heard a deep groan, and a body falling heavily to the earth.

Horrified, he snatched off the handkerchief and beheld Count d'Altavilla, pale and motionless, stretched on his back, and a great red stain on his shirt just above the heart. The handsome Neapolitan was dead!

Paul placed upon the Count's breast the note that certified to the fairness of the duel, and left the baths paler in the broad daylight than is in the moonlight the criminal whom Prud'hon has represented as pursued by the avenging Erinnyes.

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XIV

AT about two o'clock that afternoon, a company of English tourists, in charge of a cicerone, was visiting the ruins of Pompeii. The island tribe, composed of a father, a mother, three tall girls, two small boys, and a cousin, had already traversed with dull, lack-lustre eyes, in which could be read the profound weariness characteristic of the British race, the amphitheatre, the Tragic Theatre, and the Comic Theatre, so quaintly collocated, the military quarter, full of the caricatures sketched by the idle guardsmen, the Forum, destroyed while it was undergoing repairs, the Basilica, the Pantheon, the Temples of Venus and of Jupiter, and the shops which line them. They all followed silently in their "Murray" the prolix explanations of the guide, scarcely casting a look at the pillars, the fragments of statues, the mosaics, the frescoes, and the inscriptions.

They at last reached the Baths, discovered, as the guide pointed out, in 1824. "Here stood the vapour baths; here was the furnace, and there the cooling

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room." These details, imparted in Neapolitan dialect, mingled with a few English terminations, did not appear to greatly interest the visitors, who had already turned round in order to go out, when Miss Ethelwina, the eldest of the young ladies, a maiden with tow-like fair hair, and a very much freckled complexion, started back, half-shocked, half-frightened, exclaiming: —

"There 's a man!"

"No doubt some workman employed in the work of digging, who thought this was a good place in which to enjoy a siesta, as it is cool and shady in this vault," answered the guide. "You need not be afraid, Miss." And he kicked the prone body. "Here, you fellow, wake up and let their ladyships pass."

But the supposed sleeper did not budge.

"He is not sleeping, he is dead," said one of the lads, who, owing to his smaller stature, could better make out the look of the body in the darkness.

The guide bent down to examine the body and started up quickly, his face full of terror.

"The man has been murdered!" he cried.

"Oh! how shocking to come upon such a thing," exclaimed Mrs. Bracebridge. "Come away, Ethel-

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wina, Kitty, and Bess," she went on. "It is not proper for young ladies who have been well brought up to look at so unpleasant a sight. Is there no police in this country? Why has not the coroner removed the body?"

"Here is a paper," said the cousin, who was tall, stiff, and awkward as the Laird of Dumbiedikes in "The Heart of Midlothian."

"True," said the guide, picking up the note placed upon d'Altavilla's breast.

"Read it out," cried the islanders in a body, their curiosity fully awakened.

"Let no one be sought out or prosecuted on account of my death. If this note is found on my wound, I shall have fallen in a fair duel.

"FELIPE, COUNT D'ALTAVILLA."

"He was a man of rank. It is most sad," said Mrs. Bracebridge, impressed by the dead man's title.

"And handsome," whispered Miss Ethelwina the freckled.

"You cannot complain any longer of not meeting with anything startling on our trip," said Bess to Kitty, "for if we have not been stopped by brigands on the

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road from Terracina to Fondi, to come upon a young nobleman stabbed with a stiletto in the ruins of Pompeii is surely an adventure. There must have been some love affair at the bottom of it, and we shall now have something Italian, picturesque, and romantic to tell our friends. I shall make a sketch of the scene in my album, and you can add to it some mysterious stanzas in the Byronian style."

"All the same," said the guide, "the stroke was a good one, from below upwards, quite according to rule, and no mistake."

Such was the funeral discourse pronounced over the body of Count d'Altavilla.

Some workmen, summoned by the guide, proceeded to fetch the police, and poor d'Altavilla's remains were conveyed to his family seat near Salerno.

As for d'Aspremont, he had returned to his carriage with staring eyes, seeing no more than a somnambulist would have done. He looked like a statue walking along. Although the sight of the body had filled him with the religious awe inspired by death, he did not feel guilty and there was no remorse in his despair. Insulted in a way that admitted of no refusal, he had accepted the duel only in the hope of losing in it a life

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that was henceforth odious to him. Gifted with a deadly glance, he had insisted upon the blindfolding in order that fatality alone should bear the responsibility of the outcome. He had not even struck the blow; his foe had rushed upon the blade. He felt as sorry for d'Altavilla as if he had had nothing to do with his death.

"It was my stiletto that slew him," he said to himself. "Now, if I had looked at him in a ball-room, a chandelier would have fallen from the ceiling and broken his head. I am as innocent as the thunderbolt, the avalanche, the manchineel tree, as all destructive, unconscious forces. My will has never been maleficent, my heart is full of love and kindliness, but I know that I am a harmful being. The thunderbolt does not know that it inflicts death, but I, who am a man, an intelligent creature, have I not a hard duty to fulfil towards myself? I am bound to summon myself to the bar of my own conscience and to examine myself. Have I the right to remain on this earth where I do nothing but work woe? Would God damn me if I were to kill myself for love of my fellow-creatures? It is a terrible and difficult question I dare not solve. Yet it seems to me that suicide is

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excusable in a man situated as I am. But if I am mistaken? Then throughout eternity I should be deprived of the sight of Alicia, whom then I could gaze upon without hurting her, for the eyes of the soul are free from the fascino. That is a risk I shall not run."

A sudden thought flashed through the brain of the unfortunate jettatore, breaking in upon his mental monologue. His features relaxed, and the peace that comes of a great resolution smoothed his pale brow. He had come to a supreme decision.

"Be ye condemned, ye eyes of mine, since ye are murderous. But before closing for ever, saturate yourselves with light, gaze upon the sun, the blue sky, the mighty sea, the green trees, the far horizons, the palace colonnades, the fishers' huts, the distant isles in the bay, the white sails flitting over the deep, Vesuvius and its plume of smoke; gaze upon all these lovely sights that you shall never again behold, so that you may remember them. Study every form and every tint, feast on them for the last time. To-day, whether ye be deadly or not, ye shall rest upon every thing and intoxicate yourselves with the glorious spectacle of creation. Come! look around, for the cur-

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tain is about to fall between you and this earthly scene!"

The carriage, at this moment, was driving along the shore. The azure bay glittered in the light; the sky seemed made of a single sapphire; a splendour of beauty was on all things. Paul ordered Scazziga to pull up; he alighted, sat down upon a rock, and looked long, long, long, as though he were striving to imbibe the infinite. His eyes plunged into space and light, rolled as though in ecstasy, filled themselves with the colour, and absorbed the sunshine. The night that was about to fall upon him was to have no morrow.

Tearing himself away from his contemplation, d'Aspremont re-entered his carriage and had himself driven to Miss Ward's.

He found her, as on the previous day, lying upon her narrow couch in the lower room I have already described. Paul sat down opposite her, and this time he did not keep his eyes on the ground as was his habit since he had learned he was a jettatore.

Alicia's wondrously perfect beauty had become idealised through suffering; the woman in her had almost disappeared and made way for the angel. Her flesh had become transparent, ethereal, luminous.

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Her soul shone through it as the flame through an alabaster lamp. Her eyes were filled with the infinity of the heavens and scintillated like stars; scarce did the mark of life show in her crimson lips.

A heavenly smile, like a sunbeam in a rose, illumined those lips when she saw her lover's glance envelop her like a long caress. She thought Paul had at last got rid of his fancies and was returning to her happy and trustful as in the early days of their love. She held out to him her little white, slender hand, and he kept it in his own.

"So you are no longer afraid of me," she said with sweet raillery to Paul, who still kept his glance fixed upon her.

"Oh! let me gaze upon you," replied d'Aspremont in a strange tone of voice as he knelt down by her. "Let me drink in your ineffable beauty."

And he eagerly contemplated Alicia's lustrous black hair, her lovely brow as pure as that of a Greek statue, her eyes dusky blue as a lovely night, her delicately modelled nose, her mouth with the pearly teeth revealed by a languorous smile, her willowy, swan-like neck, and he seemed to note each detail, each perfection as might a painter preparing to draw a portrait from

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memory. He was sating himself with the sight of the beloved one, making a collection of remembrances, assuring himself of the outlines, going over the contours.

Under his burning gaze, Alicia, fascinated and charmed, experienced a voluptuously painful sensation, pleasantly deadly. Her life seemed to become more intense and to be leaving her; she blushed and paled, turned hot and cold by turns. In another moment her soul would have fled.

She put her hand on Paul's eyes, but his glance traversed the transparent and frail fingers like a flame.

"Now my eyes may close for ever, for in my heart I shall see her for ever," said Paul to himself as he rose to his feet.

That night, after having looked at the sunset — the last he was to behold — he ordered, on his return to the Hôtel de Rome, a brazier and charcoal.

"Does he propose to asphyxiate himself?" wondered Virgilio Falsacappa, as he handed Paddy the required articles. "It is the best thing that cursed jettatore could do."

Alicia's betrothed opened the window, contrary to Falsacappa's expectation, lighted the coals, plunged the

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blade of a dagger into them, and waited until the steel had become red hot.

The thin blade soon showed white-hot in the burning coals. Paul, as if to bid himself farewell, leaned on the mantelpiece in front of a tall mirror that reflected the light of a candelabrum with a number of candles. He gazed with melancholy curiosity upon that sort of spectre that was himself, that envelope of his thought he was never again to see.

"Farewell," he said, "farewell, pale phantom that for so many years I have dragged through life; farewell, sinister failure in which beauty mingles with horror; mould of clay stamped on the brow with a fatal sign; contorted mask of a tender and gentle soul! Thou art about to vanish for ever from my sight. Living, I plunge thee into eternal darkness, and soon I shall have forgotten thee as one forgets the dream of a night of storm. In vain shalt thou say, thou wretched body, to my inflexible will, 'Hubert, Hubert, my poor eyes!' Thou shalt not soften it. Come, let me to work, for I am both the victim and the executioner."

And he left the chimneypiece to seat himself on his bed.

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He blew upon the coals in the brazier that stood on a table near by, and seized by the hilt the blade, from which flew with a crackling sound bright, white sparks.

At this crucial moment, firm as was his resolve, d'Aspremont felt himself turn faint; a cold sweat bathed his temples; but he soon overcame this purely physical weakness and put the burning steel close to his eyes.

He nearly screamed as he felt a sharp, lancinating pain. It seemed to him that two jets of molten lead were entering his eyes and penetrating to his very brain. He let fall the dagger, which rolled to the floor and charred it.

A dense, opaque darkness, in comparison with which the deepest night is as brightest day, shrouded him in its black veils. He turned his head in the direction of the mantelpiece where the tapers must have been still burning, but met only profound, impenetrable obscurity, in which did not even show the faint gleams which seeing people behold when with closed eyes they find themselves in presence of a light. His sacrifice was accomplished.

"Now," said Paul, "thou noble and charming creature, I may become thy husband without becoming a murderer. No longer shalt thou waste away

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under my destructive glance; thou shalt regain thy health. Alas! I shall see thee no more, but thy celestial image shall shine with immortal brilliancy in my memory; I shall behold thee with the eyes of the soul; I shall hear thy voice, more harmonious than the sweetest music; I shall feel the air displaced by thy motions; I shall notice the silken rustling of thy dress, the faint creaking of thy shoes; I shall breathe the soft scent that emanates from thee, forming an atmosphere round thee. At times thou shalt leave thy hand in mine to make me feel thy presence; thou wilt deign to guide thy poor blind lover when his steps hesitate upon their dark way; thou shalt read him the poets, and tell him of the paintings and the statues. Thy speech shall restore to him the vanished universe; thou shalt be his one thought, his one dream. Freed from the distraction of things and the dazzling light, his soul shall fly to thee on unwearying wings.

"I regret nothing, since thou art saved. What have I lost, indeed? The monotonous spectacle of the seasons and the days; of the more or less picturesque setting of the scenes in which the many differing acts of the sad human comedy are played, earth, heaven, waters, mountains, trees, and flowers:

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vain appearances, wearisome repetitions, unchanging forms. He who possesses love, possesses the true sunshine, the light that never fails."

Thus did the unfortunate Paul d'Aspremont commune with himself, a prey to lyrical excitement mingled with the delirium due to pain. Little by little the acute suffering was dulled, and he fell into dark sleep, brother of death and like it a consoler.

When daylight penetrated into the room, it did not wake him. Midnight and noon were henceforth the same to him, but the bells, ringing out the Angelus with joyous peals, sounded faint through his sleep and, gradually becoming more distinct, drew him from his condition of somnolence.

He opened his eyelids, and, ere his soul had recollected, experienced a horrible sensation. His eyes opened out upon the void, the darkness, the nothingness, as if, having been buried alive, he had awakened out of a trance and found himself in his coffin. He soon recovered, however, for was it not to be always thus? Was he not, day by day, to pass from the darkness of sleep to the darkness of waking?

He groped round for the bell-rope. Paddy hastened to answer his ring, and as he manifested surprise at

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seeing his master rise with the hesitating movements of a blind man, —

"I was imprudent enough to sleep with the window open," said Paul, in order to cut short all explanations, "and I think I have got amaurosis. I shall soon be better. Lead me to my arm-chair and put a glass of fresh water by my side."

Paddy, with true English discretion, made no comment, carried out his master's orders, and withdrew.

Left alone, Paul dipped his handkerchief in the cold water and held it to his eyes to deaden the inflammation due to the burning.

But let me leave d'Aspremont in his painful immobility, and let me turn to the other characters in my story.

The strange news of Count d'Altavilla's death had quickly spread through Naples and furnished food for innumerable conjectures, each more absurd than the others. The Count was famed for his skill as a swordsman; he had the reputation of being one of the most expert fencers of the Neapolitan school, so dangerous on the duelling-ground. He had killed three men and had grievously wounded five or six. His reputation in this respect was so well known that he was no longer

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called out; the most insolent duellists saluted him respectfully, and, if he happened to look insultingly at them, avoided treading on his toes. Had one of these swashbucklers slain d'Altavilla, he would not have failed to brag of the victory.

There remained the possibility of murder, but that was removed by the paper found on the dead man's breast. The authenticity of the note was at first called in question, but the Count's handwriting was vouched for by persons who had received many letters from him. The fact that he had been blindfolded, for the body was found with a handkerchief fastened round the head, proved an insurmountable difficulty. Besides the stiletto driven into the Count's breast, a second one was found, which no doubt had fallen from his hand. On the other hand, if the duel had been fought with knives, what was the purpose of the swords and pistols which were recognised as having been the Count's property? The coachman, on being questioned, stated that he had driven his master to Pompeii, and had been ordered to return home if the latter did not reappear within an hour. The mystery could not be solved.

The report of the death speedily reached the ears of Vicè, who informed Sir Joshua Ward. The Commo-

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dore, who at once recollected his mysterious conversation with d'Altavilla about Alicia, suspected that some dark attempt, some horrible and desperate struggle had taken place between him and d'Aspremont, with or without the consent of the latter. As for Vicè, she did not hesitate to attribute the death of the handsome Count to the atrocious jettatore, her hatred of the latter acting as second sight. Yet Mr. d'Aspremont had paid his visit to Miss Ward at the usual time, and his countenance did not betray the least sign of emotion after a terrible drama; indeed, he appeared calmer than usual.

The fact of the death was concealed from Miss Ward, whose condition had become critical, though the English physician summoned by Sir Joshua could not perceive that she was suffering from any definite malady. Her life seemed to be ebbing away; her soul seemed to be fluttering its wings in an attempt to escape; she appeared to be suffocating, like a bird in a vacuum, rather than to be attacked by a real disease, capable of being treated by ordinary means. She looked like an angel kept back on earth and dying of home-sickness of heaven, — her loveliness so suave, so delicate, so diaphanous, so immaterial, that the coarse atmosphere

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of earth could no longer sustain her. One could only imagine her soaring in the golden light of Paradise, and the little lace pillow that supported her head shone like an aureole. As she lay on her bed, she resembled Schoorel's dainty Virgin, the most delicate gem of Gothic art.

Mr. d'Aspremont did not call that day. In order to conceal his sacrifice, he had resolved not to appear with his eyelids inflamed, reserving to himself to explain his blindness by some other cause. But the next morning, the pain having ceased, he entered his carriage, guided by his groom Paddy.

The carriage drew up as usual at the open-work gate. The self-blinded man pushed it open, and feeling the ground with his foot, entered the well-known walk. Vicè had not, as her custom was, hastened up on hearing the bell which was rung by the opening of the gate. None of the innumerable joyous sounds that form, as it were, the breathing of an inhabited house, reached Paul's attentive ear. A gloomy, deep, terrifying silence reigned in the dwelling, which might have been thought abandoned. This silence, sinister even to a seeing person, became still more dread in the darkness that surrounded the new-made blind man.

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The branches, which he could no longer perceive, seemed to try to hold him back like the arms of suppliants and to prevent his going farther. The laurels barred his way; the rose-bushes caught at his clothing; the creepers clung to his limbs; the garden said to him in its mute voice: "Unfortunate man, what doest thou here? Do not force the obstacles that I oppose to thee; return, return!" But Paul did not listen, and tormented by dreadful presentiments, lurched into the foliage, pushed back the clumps of verdure, broke the branches, and kept on towards the house.

Torn and bruised by the angry shrubs, he at last reached the end of the walk. A gust of free air struck him on the face, and he continued on his way with outstretched hands. He came up against the wall, and found the door by groping for it.

He entered. No friendly voice welcomed him. Hearing no sound by which he might guide himself, he hesitated for a moment upon the threshold. A smell of ether, the perfume of aromatics, the odour of burning wax, all the faint scents of a room of death came to the blind man breathless with terror. A dreadful idea came into his mind, and he entered the room.

He had scarcely proceeded a few steps when he

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knocked up against something that fell with much noise. He bent down, and recognised by the feel a metal candlestick like those in churches, and fitted with a tall candle.

Bewildered, he went on his way through the darkness. He thought he heard a voice repeating prayers in a low tone. He took another step forward and his hands touched the edge of a couch. He bent over it, and his trembling fingers first came in contact with a motionless body lying stiff and stark under a fine tunic; then they felt a wreath of roses and a face as pure and cold as marble.

It was Alicia lying on her death-bed.

"Dead!" shrieked Paul in a choking voice. "Dead! And I have killed her!"

The horror-stricken Commodore had seen the blind phantom stagger in, grope his way about and stumble against Alicia's death-bed. He had understood at once, and the grandeur of the sacrifice, unfortunately useless, brought the tears to the reddened eyes of the old gentleman who had believed himself incapable of weeping again.

Paul threw himself on his knees by the bedside and covered Alicia's ice-cold hand with kisses, while con-

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vulsive sobs shook his frame. His grief softened the fierce Vicè herself, as she stood silent and sombre by the wall, watching over her mistress' last sleep.

When his adieux were over, d'Aspremont rose and walked to the door, stiffly, like an automaton moved by springs. His sightless eyes, wide open and staring, had a supernatural expression, and though they were blinded they seemed still endowed with vision. He traversed the garden with the heavy tread of a marble statue, went out into the country and walked on straight ahead, stumbling against the stones, staggering at times, listening intently as if to catch a distant sound, but ever advancing.

The sea's great voice sounded more and more distinct. The billows, lashed by a storm wind, broke on the shore with mighty sobs, expressing unknown griefs, and under the foam fringe swelled their despairing breasts; millions of bitter tears streamed upon the rocks, and the restless gulls uttered plaintive cries.

Presently Paul reached the edge of an overhanging rock. The roar of the waves, the salt spray torn from the billows by the gusts of wind and which lashed his face, should have warned him of his danger, but he heeded it not. A strange smile flitted over his blanched

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lips and he kept on his sinister walk, although he felt the void beneath his lifted foot.

He fell; a huge billow seized him, rolled him over and over for a moment and then swallowed him up.

Then the storm broke out in its fury; the waves swept up the shore in serried files, like soldiers storming a fort, and threw the spray of their crests fifty feet into the air. The black clouds were torn open as though they were the walls of hell, and through the fissures showed the burning furnace of the lightnings; sulphurous, blinding flashes illumined space; the summit of Vesuvius glowed, and its sable plume of smoke, beaten down by the wind, curled around the volcano's brow. The vessels at anchor collided with lugubrious sounds, and the tautened rigging moaned dolorously. Then the rain came down, its drops like driven bolts, and it seemed as though chaos were striving to reassert its supremacy over nature and once again to confound the elements.

All the efforts set on foot by the Commodore failed to bring about the recovery of Paul d'Aspremont's body.

A silver-mounted, satin-lined, ebony casket, like the one concerning which Clarissa Harlowe wrote so

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touchingly to Master Undertaker, was shipped on board a yacht under the Commodore's superintendence, and subsequently deposited in the family vault in the Lincolnshire seat. It contained the mortal remains of Alicia Ward, lovely even in death.

As for the Commodore, a great change has taken place in him. He is no longer stout, puts no rum in his tea, eats very little, talks less, and has lost his crimson and white look — for he has become pale.

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The Water Pavilion

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The WATER PAVILION

IN the province of Canton, some distance from the city, lived side by side two rich Chinamen who had retired. At what period this took place is of small consequence, for the chronology of tales need not be very accurate. One of the Chinamen was called Tou, and the other Kouan. Tou had held high scientific offices; he was a scholar of the Jasper Hall and a *hanlin*. Kouan had grown rich and honoured in less exalted employment.

Tou and Kouan, who were distantly related, had formerly been friends. When they were younger they had enjoyed meeting with some of their former classmates and during the autumn evenings they were wont to make the black pigment-laden brush fly over the quadrilling of the flowered paper, and to sing the praises of the chrysanthemum while sipping small cups of wine. Their dispositions, at first marked by the very slightest of divergences, had with time become wholly different, just as an almond bough forks, so that the two parts, united at the bottom, are far apart at the top, and the one scatters its bitter perfume in the garden,

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while the other sheds its snowy blossoms outside the wall.

Year by year Tou became more imposing; his paunch rounded out more majestically, his triple chin looked more solemn. He now wrote only moral verses suitable for hanging on the posts of the pavilions.

Kouan, on the contrary, seemed to grow jollier as he grew older, and sang more delightedly than ever wine, flowers, and swallows. His mind, freed from vulgar cares, was quick and bright as that of a young man, and when the word to be set in verse had been announced, his hand did not hesitate for a second.

Little by little the two friends had got to hate each other. They never spoke but they irritated each other by sharp words; they were like two hedges bristling with thorns and briers. Matters came to such a pass that they ceased to have anything to do with each other, and hung on the front of their houses a tablet bearing a formal interdiction to the inhabitants of the neighbouring home ever to cross the threshold of theirs.

They would willingly have uprooted their homes and planted them elsewhere, but unfortunately this was not possible. Tou, indeed, tried to sell his property, but he could not get his price, and, besides, it is

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always unpleasant to have to leave the carved walls, the polished tables, the transparent windows, the gilded trellises, the bamboo seats, the porcelain vases, the red or black lacquer cabinets, the cartouches of ancient poems, which one has taken so much pains to arrange. It is hard to hand over to another man the garden one has planted with willows, peach and plum trees, and where, in each successive springtime, one has watched the blooming of the pretty mei flower. Each of these things binds the heart of man with a thread more tenuous than silk, but as hard to break as an iron chain.

At the time when Tou and Kouan were friends, they had each built a pavilion in their garden, upon the bank of a pond that was owned jointly by them. They used to enjoy greeting each other from the balcony and smoking a drop of burning opium upon the porcelain mushroom pipe as they exchanged kindly puffs. Since they had quarrelled, however, they had built a wall that cut the pond into two equal parts; only, as the pond was deep, the wall rested upon piles forming low arches, through the openings of which passed the waters that reflected the pavilion on the other side.

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Each pavilion was three stories in height, with receding terraces. The roofs, curved and turned up at the corners like clogs, were covered with round, shining tiles like the scales that cover the belly of carps. On each ridge were crocketings in the form of leaves and dragons. Red varnished pillars, joined by a traceried frieze, resembling the blade of a fan, supported the elegant roof. The shafts of these pillars rested upon a little low wall, overlaid with porcelain squares arranged in pleasant symmetry, and protected by a railing of quaint design, the whole forming a sort of open gallery in front of the main building.

The same arrangement was repeated, with some variants, on each story. In the one case the porcelain tiles were replaced by *bassi-relievi* illustrating pastoral scenes; or a trellis work of curiously interlaced branches of quaintest twists took the place of the balcony, or, again, posts, painted in bright colours, formed pedestals on which were set warty monsters and fantastic figures, the result of the union of every sort of impossibility. The buildings each ended in a wrought and gilded cornice, with a balustrade of bamboos, selected for the regularity of the knots, and adorned in each compartment with a ball of metal.

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The interior was no less sumptuous. On the walls a skilful hand had inscribed in perpendicular lines, in gilded letters upon a lacquer background, verses of Tou Chi and Li Tai Pe. A milky, opaline light filtered through the windows, fitted with panes of talc. On the window sills artistically arranged pots of peonies, Chinese primroses, white blossomed erythrinas, delighted the eyes with their delicate tints. Squares of beautiful flowered silk were placed in the corners of the various rooms, and on the tables, that were polished like mirrors, were always to be found toothpicks, fans, ebony pipes, brushes, and all necessary writing materials.

Artificial rockeries, in which grew willows and walnut trees, formed the foundations of these pretty buildings on the land side, while on the water side they rested on indestructible piles.

It was really a delightful spectacle to see the willows' golden filaments and silken tufts streaming down towards the surface of the water, and the brilliant colours of the pavilions reflected within a framework of multicoloured foliage.

In the crystal wave gambolled shoals of azure fishes, with golden scales; squadrons of pretty ducks with emerald necks sailed about in every direction, and the

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broad leaves of the nymphœa nelumbo spread out lazily under the diamond-like transparency of the lakelet, that was fed by a spring.

Save in the centre, where the bottom was formed of exceedingly fine silvery sand, and where the bubbling up of the spring did not allow the water plants to take root, the rest of the pond was covered with the loveliest green velvet carpet that ever was seen, formed by great banks of water-cress.

But for the ugly wall erected by the reciprocal enmity of the two neighbours, there certainly would not have been anywhere in the Middle Empire, which, as every one knows, covers more than three fourths of the earth's surface, a more picturesque and more delightful garden. Each one could have increased his property with the view over his neighbour's, for here below man can have only the outward aspect of things. Such as it was, however, no sage could have wished for a pleasanter and more agreeable retreat in which to end his days in the contemplation of nature and the charm of poetry.

All Tou and Kouan had gained by their quarrel was the sight of an ugly wall, and the depriving each other of the view of the lovely pavilions, but the

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thought of the annoyance they had inflicted on each other consoled them.

This state of things had lasted for some years, and nettles and other weeds had overgrown the paths that led from the one house to the other. The branches of the thorn bushes had become interlaced, as though to prevent any intercommunication. It looked as though the plants were aware of the dissensions between the two former friends and took part in them by trying to separate them still further.

Meanwhile Tou's wife and Kouan's had each given birth to a child. Mrs. Tou was the mother of a lovely girl, and Mrs. Kouan of the handsomest boy in the world. This happy event, which had brought joy to each household, was unknown to the other, for although their properties marched with each other, the two Chinamen lived as much apart as though their homes had been divided by the Yellow River or the Great Wall, and their mutual friends avoided making any allusion to the other family, while the respective servants had orders not to speak to each other when they met, under pain of the lash and the cangue.

The boy was called Tchin Sing, and the girl Ju Kiouan, that is, Pearl and Jasper, names well borne

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out by their perfect beauty. As soon as they had grown up a little, the wall, which cut the pond into two parts and annoyingly closed the view on that side, excited their curiosity, and they asked their parents what there was on the other side of that erection so curiously placed in the centre of the stretch of water, and whose were the high trees the tops of which they could see. They were told that queer, disagreeable, unpleasant, and wholly unsociable people lived there, and that the wall had been put up as a protection against these wicked neighbours. The children were satisfied with the explanation, and having got used to the wall, did not trouble about it any more.

Ju Kiouan grew in grace and perfection. She was skilled in all the occupations of her sex, and plied her needle with incomparable adroitness. The butterflies she embroidered upon satin seemed to be alive and to flutter their wings; one would have sworn that the birds she wrought upon her canvas could be heard singing, and more than one person bent down to breathe the perfume of the flowers she scattered upon it. Nor were Ju Kiouan's accomplishments confined to this; she knew by heart the Book of Odes and the Five Rules of Life, and never did a lighter hand trace

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on silk paper bolder and clearer characters. The flight of dragons is not swifter than her wrist when she sprayed the black ink with a brush. She knew all the poetic modes, the Slow, the Quick, the Elevated, the Re-entering, and composed very meritorious pieces on such subjects as naturally strike a maiden: the return of the swallows, the willows in springtime, the chrysanthemums, and other kindred topics. More than one scholar who considered himself worthy of bestriding the golden steed could not have improvised as easily as she did.

Nor had Tchin Sing profited less by his studies. His name stood first on the examiners' list, and although he was still very young, he might have worn the black cap, while every mother already reflected that a youth so learned would make an excellent son-in-law and would speedily attain to the highest literary dignities. Tchin Sing, however, replied pleasantly to the negotiators who were sent to him, and said that it was too early for him to marry, that he wished to enjoy his bachelor freedom for some time longer. He refused one after the other Hon Giu, Lo Men Gli, Oma, Po Fo and other very well bred young ladies. Never was any youth more petted and the recipient

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of more advances, not even the handsome Fan Gan, whose carriage was filled with sweets and oranges by the ladies as he drove home after practising shooting with his bow and arrows. But Tchin Sing's heart appeared to be insensible to love, not through coldness, however, for by a thousand signs it was plain that he was tender-hearted; only it seemed as though he preserved the memory of some one he had known in a previous life and hoped to meet in this world. In vain were the willow-leaf-like eyebrows, the tiny feet and the dragon-fly waists of the beauties proposed to him praised; he listened inattentively and as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

On her part Ju Kiouan proved no less difficult to please, and dismissed all her suitors, the one because he bowed ungracefully, the other because he was careless in his dress, a third because his handwriting was heavy and vulgar, a fourth because he did not know the Book of Verses — in a word, all suffered from some defect or other. Ju Kiouan drew such comical portraits of them that her parents were compelled to laugh at them, and as politely as possible showed out the unfortunate suitor who had already imagined himself entering the Oriental pavilion.

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At last the parents of the two young people began to feel some alarm at their persistent rejection of every match proposed to them. Mrs. Tou and Mrs. Kouan, no doubt preoccupied by thoughts of settling their children, dreamed at night of what they thought of all day long, and one of their dreams made a great impression upon them. Mrs. Kouan dreamed that she saw upon her son's breast a jasper stone so marvellously polished that it gleamed like a carbuncle. On the other hand, Mrs. Tou dreamed that her daughter was wearing on her neck a pearl of the finest water and of priceless value. What could these two dreams mean? Did the vision vouchsafed to Mrs. Kouan foretell for Tchin Sing the honours of the Imperial Academy, and did that of Mrs. Tou presage that Ju Kiouan was to find a treasure buried in the garden or hidden under a stone of the hearth? This view was entirely reasonable, and more than one person would have been satisfied with it, but the worthy ladies saw in these visions allusions to excellent matches soon to be made by their respective children. Unfortunately, both Tchin Sing and Ju Kiouan persisted more resolutely than ever in their refusals and thus gave the lie to the prophecies.

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Although they had no dreams, Kouan and Tou were also amazed at the young people's obstinacy, marriage being a ceremony which does not usually excite prolonged aversion in youths and maidens. They fancied that their resistance might be due to some secret attachment, but Tchin Sing paid attentions to no girl, and no young man wandered by the trellises of Ju Kiouan, as both families easily ascertained after a few days' watching. Mrs. Tou and Mrs. Kouan were therefore more than ever convinced that the dreams foretold great destinies for their offspring.

The two ladies each went to consult the priest of the Temple of Fô, a handsome building with traceried roofs, round windows, a tower glittering with varnish and gilding, overlaid with votive tablets, adorned with flag-poles from which flew banners ornamented with monsters and dragons, and shaded by trees centuries old and of enormous size. After having burned gilded paper and perfumes before the idol, the priest told Mrs. Tou that the jasper must have the pearl, and told Mrs. Kouan that the pearl must have the jasper, as their union alone could put an end to all difficulties. Little satisfied with this ambiguous reply, the two ladies returned home, without having met in the temple, by a road

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different from that by which they had come, and as greatly perplexed as before.

Now it happened that Ju Kiouan was one day leaning on the balcony of the rustic pavilion precisely at the moment when Tchin Sing was doing the same. The weather was fine; there was not a cloud in the sky, nor wind enough to move the leaves of the quivering aspen, and not a ripple on the glass-smooth surface of the pond. Only now and again did a carp, leaping and gambolling, make a circle that soon disappeared. The trees on the bank were so accurately reflected in it that it was hard to tell the image from the reality; they looked like a forest planted upside down and uniting its roots with those of an identical wood; like a grove that had drowned itself for love, in a word. The fish seemed to swim in the foliage, and the birds to be flying in the water.

Ju Kiouan was amusing herself watching this wonderful transparency when, on glancing at that part of the pond that lay by the dividing wall, she saw the reflection of the opposite pavilion that spread to that point through the arch. She had never noticed this optical effect, which both surprised and interested her. She could make out the red pillars, the traceried frieze,

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the pots of chrysanthemums, the gilded vanes, and but that they were reversed by the reflection, she could have read the inscriptions on the tablets. But what most surprised her was to see leaning upon the rail of the balcony, in a position exactly like her own, a figure so like herself that, had it not shown from the other side of the wall, she would have taken it for her own image. It was the figure of Tchin Sing, and if my reader thinks it strange that a young fellow should be mistaken for a girl, I shall reply that Tchin Sing had taken off his licentiate's cap on account of the heat, that he was still very young and beardless, and that his delicate features, his smooth complexion and his brilliant eyes might well contribute to the illusion, which for the matter of that, was not of long duration. Ju Kiouan quickly felt, by the beating of her heart, that it was no girl whose image was reflected in the wave.

Until then she had not believed that earth held the being created for her, and she had often longed to possess one of Fargana's horses, that can travel three thousand miles in one day, so that she might seek him out in unknown space. She fancied her mate did not exist in this world, and that she would never know the happiness of the union of the teals. "Never," she would

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say to herself, "shall I consecrate on the altar of my ancestors the drop of water and the alisma, and I shall enter alone the grove of mulberries and elms."

But when she beheld the reflection in the water, she knew that her beauty had a sister, or a brother, rather, and far from being annoyed at this, she felt exceedingly happy. The pride of being unique quickly yielded to love, for from that moment Ju Kiouan's heart was for ever given. The exchange of a single glance, not even directly, but by reflection, is sufficient to bring about such a result. And let not Ju Kiouan be accused of frivolity on that account, and let it not be said that she was foolish to fall in love with a man merely for having seen his reflection in the water. What more, unless one has the advantage of long acquaintance, so that the character may be studied, does a girl see of a suitor? His outward aspect only, like his reflection in a mirror; and is it not the wont of maidens to judge of their future husbands by the enamel of their teeth and the cut of their nails?

Tchin Sing also had caught sight of the wondrous beauty.

"Am I dreaming, while awake?" he exclaimed. "Surely that lovely face sparkling in the crystal water

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was formed of the moon's silvery beams and of the most subtile aroma of the flowers on some spring night. Though I have never seen her, I recognise her: she is indeed the woman whose image is engraved on my heart, the fair unknown to whom I address my distichs and my quatrains."

Tchin Sing had got so far in his monologue, when he heard his father's voice calling to him.

"My son," said the old gentleman, "my friend Wing has called to propose a very rich and suitable match for you. The young lady has imperial blood in her veins; she is famous for her beauty, and has all the qualities fitted to make a husband happy."

Tchin Sing, full of the incident of the pavilion and burning with love for the girl whose image he had seen in the water, refused unhesitatingly. His father, transported with rage, lost his temper and hurled the fiercest threats at him.

"You scoundrel," cried the old gentleman, "if you persist in your obstinacy, I shall ask the magistrate to have you imprisoned in the fortress held by the Western barbarians, and from which nothing can be seen save rocks washed by the waves, mountains capped with clouds, and dark waters traversed by those mon-

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strous inventions of the evil genii, which travel with paddles and vomit fetid smoke. There you will have leisure to reflect and to mend your ways."

These threats did not greatly frighten Tchin Sing, who replied that he was ready to accept the first bride that came along, provided it were not the one now offered him.

The next day, at the same hour, he returned to the rural pavilion, and as on the previous day, he leaned over the railing of the balcony. In a few minutes, he saw Ju Kiouan's image reflected on the water like a bouquet of submerged flowers. The young man put his hand to his heart, kissed the tip of his fingers and blew the kiss to the reflection with a gesture full of grace and love.

A smile of happiness bloomed like a pomegranate bud in the transparent water and proved to Tchin Sing that he was not indifferent to the fair unknown, but as it is not possible to carry on a long conversation with a reflection of which the body is invisible, he made a sign that he was about to write and returned into the pavilion. A few minutes later he came out, holding a square of tinted silver paper on which he had improvised a declaration of love in seven syllables.

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He rolled it up and enclosed it in the calyx of a flower, which he put into a broad water-lily leaf, and placed the parcel gently on the water.

A light air, that arose most seasonably, drove the love letter towards one of the bays in the wall, so that all Ju Kiouan had to do was to bend and pick it up. Fearful of being surprised, she withdrew to her most secret chamber, and there read with infinite pleasure the expressions of love and the metaphors of which Tchin Sing had made use. Besides the delight of being loved, she had the satisfaction of being so by a scholarly man, for the beauty of the handwriting, the selection of the words, the excellence of the rimes and the brilliancy of the images testified to his admirable education. What most struck her was the name Tchin Sing. She had too often heard her mother tell of her dreaming of a pearl not to be struck by this coincidence, and she did not for a moment doubt but that Tchin Sing was the husband Heaven meant for her.

The next day, as the wind had gone round, Ju Kiouan sent in the same way towards the opposite pavilion, a reply in verse, in which, in spite of the modesty natural in a girl, it was easy to read that she shared Tchin Sing's love.

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As he read the signature to the letter, Tchin Sing could not repress an exclamation of surprise: —

"Jasper! Was not that the gem my mother saw in her dream gleaming upon my breast like a carbuncle? Decidedly, I must call at that house, for it is there that dwells the bride promised me by the spirits of night."

But as he started to go out, he remembered the dissensions which divided the owners and the prohibitions inscribed upon the tablets. Not knowing what he had best do, he told the whole story to his mother. Meanwhile Ju Kiouan had told hers everything that had passed. The names Jasper and Pearl appeared to the two ladies to solve the riddle, and they returned to the Temple of Fô to consult the priest.

The priest replied that they had rightly interpreted the dream, and that if they did not conform to it they would incur the wrath of Heaven. Moved by the entreaties of the two mothers, and also by some presents they gave him, he undertook to talk to both Tou and Kouan; and he so neatly trapped them that, when they learned who were the parties to the proposed match, they had already given their consent.

When the pair met, the two old friends wondered

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at having quarrelled for such slight reasons, and felt how much they had lost by their separation. The wedding took place, and Pearl and Jasper were at last able to converse in a more agreeable way than by the medium of their reflections. Were they any the happier for it? I dare not venture to affirm it, for happiness is often but an image in water.

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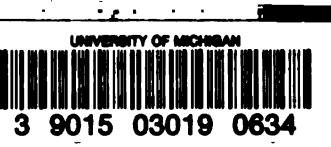

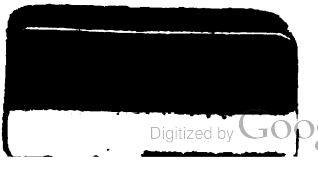

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